

Testimony to the Joint House and Senate Appropriations Committee  
Rutland February 25, 1919  
By Thomas Adams, 65 Hazel St, Rutland

First I want to thank you for taking the time and making the effort to bring committee members to six locations across the state today.

My name is Thomas Adams and I am here tonight to ask for increased support for elderly and disabled Vermonters. As a board member of SouthWest Vermont Council on Aging, along with the other triple A Agencies we request a 15% increase in general fund appropriations to increase reimbursements to the various meal providers around the state for meal sites and Meals on Wheels. I know that here Rutland county our Nutrition Director faced an increase request of 40% from our Meals on Wheels provider in recent contract negotiations. To be fair, not all of that was strictly for the cost of meals. The end result was a far smaller increase in payments but even then, the total maximum meals the agency could fund over the contract period had to be reduced by approximately 3 ½ percent.

And, as you all must know, this comes at a time when Vermont's elderly population is increasing to the point that we will soon be the oldest state. And Rutland County is the oldest county in the state.

I have had two relatives, my mother and older brother, who received Meals on Wheels. My mother, never one to eat balanced meals, soon cancelled the service. But for my brother, Frank, it was a different story. He greatly appreciated the meals and I am certain that this program helped him remain in his own home for several more years before his Multiple Sclerosis required a long nursing home stay. Frank enjoyed cooking but with his MS he found that he did not even have the strength to stir a batch of cookie dough. I believe his need for meal assistance is typical of those receiving Meals on Wheels. They truly can not prepare their own meals.

When I first heard several months ago about requesting that the cost of home delivered meals be covered under the Medicaid Long Term Care Choices for Care Home Waiver Program, my first thought was that this had no chance of flying. Then we were told that other states do provide meal coverage in their home waiver programs. So then I quickly changed my thoughts to why are we not doing this in Vermont in our CFC Program for

our neediest elderly citizens? While Meals on Wheels is not based on financial need, LTC Medicaid recipients are truly our poorest citizens by income and lack of assets. Let's do this. The cost is not high to add meals to the program. And this additional benefit may even pay for itself if it just keeps a few people at home with good nutrition- rather than in a costly nursing facility paid by Medicaid.

The triple A Agencies have a third request. This is to increase CFC rates paid to providers for home based care services with annual adjustments. I know that this has been introduced in House bill 189 but I have not read the exact text of that bill. We all know that Vermont is at full employment with a 2.8% rate of unemployment; and that employers report difficulty finding help. If we want to continue giving Vermonters the choice of less costly and more desirable home living situations in their final years, we need to pay an hourly rate that attracts care givers when so much other employment is available at easily adjusted labor "market" rates.

I am thinking that the House bill 189 probably is about bringing pay for caregivers up to a living wage standard of \$15 per hour. It is clear to me that we are headed in that direction in the near future for all VT workers. I believe now is the time to put this wage standard in place for our care givers who will still be working with few fringe benefits.

Again I thank you for coming to Rutland and listening to our concerns.