



To: House and Senate Committees on Appropriations
From: Courtney Anderson, Nutrition Director of Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging
Date: August 28, 2020
Re: Governor's recommended FY2021 State Budget

My Name is Courtney Anderson, and I am the Nutrition Director for the Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging. I am speaking today on behalf of the five Area Agencies on Aging to ask that you please increase funding for home and community-based providers to ensure that older Vermonters have the flexibility and the care they need to age in their homes with dignity and health. These increases are needed for parity with nursing home annual increases. Also, to increase funding by \$1 million dollars to more adequately cover the costs of providing meals and allow us to continue paying the increased rates through the end of the fiscal year. Nutrition programs support the nutritional health and independence of older Vermonters. Especially now, as we "recover" from COVID-19, these services are very important to ensure that older Vermonters have the support they need to stay healthy. Extra federal funding has been helping, but the state of Vermont needs to continue the commitment for nutrition programs for our older population.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AAA meal delivery systems have been significantly impacted, not only are we seeing a large increase in the number of meals and clients served, which is estimated to be around 25-30%, our providers are also facing increased costs due to food and supplies shortages, not to mention the increase in staff or volunteer time to keep up with the constant demand. Many of our meal providers across the state are trying to continue supporting their local farmers which costs more time and resources to prepare the local foods but in return supports our local economy. We are lucky to have such incredible providers, their "can do" attitude is truly remarkable in how they each take care of their community.

So many of the clients I've spoken to have underlying health conditions and are fearful of leaving their homes due to COVID-19 which is why they've signed up for meals on wheels in the first place. We must remember that through this program most clients are only receiving one meal a day which is not enough. I try to put myself in their shoes and think of how I would feel living off one meal a day. Nutrition is health, and we must remember that everyone benefits when we support our older Vermonters and their nutritional needs.

Thank you for the opportunity for me to address these two critical requests for your consideration within the state budget.