

Vermont Area Agencies on Aging

Age Well

Central Vermont Council on Aging

Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging

Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging

Senior Solutions



Testimony to the Legislature;

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. I am Meg Burmeister and the Executive Director of the Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging. We are one of 5 Area Agencies on Aging(AAA) that provide the home delivered meals programs to older residents (60 and older) thru funding from the Older Americans Act and the state of Vermont. We are overseen by the Vt Department of Aging and Independent Living (DAIL).

While I will share with you about our nutrition programs, I would like to help you understand our approach. Each of one of the AAA's has a helpline where people can call to learn information about programs, resources, and services available to meet their needs. The meals program is often the starting point for people to share and explore how best deal with food insecurity and often helps to begin a conversation of available options to help older residents live well. From the framework of health begins at home we often are exploring ways to support people given their unique needs. Wellness programs, case management, health insurance counseling, volunteer services, options counseling all help to provide a well-rounded means of supporting elders in our communities. The Older Americans act long ago placed value on the grass roots approach to ensuring that community need was represented on a local level with a strong emphasis on volunteers. Thus ensuring the ability to meet the unique needs of our beloved state. In doing so you will note varied models of how meals programs relate to their geographic region. Several of the more populated models in the state do so thru larger vendors (Trio) and others use a system of nonprofit meal providers. There is a significant reliance on volunteers to take limited funding and achieve the results we are fortunate to be able to provide. While the COVID funding received assisted us in offering higher reimbursement for a time and increasing meals to meet demands, that funding is not endless. We all face the "cliff" that will occur as the funds are expended.

For many the pandemic is less intense as we move to spring. For those on a fixed income, increased food and fuel prices are increasing demand. People thus have to make choices that are hard. For some it may be construed as adjusting your budget, but for those who live with limited means it is a new crisis emerging at a time when there is limited additional support for meals. For some it brings a renewed need to have home delivered meals when they can no longer afford gas prices.

The meals programs(home delivered, congregate and now take out) provide 1/3 of the recommended daily intake as required by the Older Americans Act. Menus are reviewed by a registered dietician with oversight by the AAA. Three years ago we presented before the pandemic that if we were to increase meals to more than one meal a day and more days per week then there is a shortfall of about 4 million dollars. That holds true today. We have long held this work together on a shoe string and that is reaching a crisis point as we enter this third year. Given that our testimony was quickly requested I can use my agency's numbers to highlight the trends across the state.

year	2019	2020	2021
Meal counts	175,868	227,912	240,529

As you can see the numbers have grown rather significantly and we do not seem to be seeing an end in sight. We are in the midst of determining ways to deal with the demand versus resources issue that is becoming clearer as the pandemic continues. Community collaboration is critical in weaving together a network of support. The

Foodbank has been innovative in helping to feed people. Their work to support meal programs as well as the food pantry and veggie van go programs has been critical during this pandemic. That need is not going away as evidenced by the testimony you will hear directly from the Foodbank.

Respectfully submitted;

Meg Burmeister

Executive Director of the Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging

On behalf of the Vermont Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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