May 18, 2020

RE: Opposition to May Revision $8.5 million Cut to Senior Nutrition

Dear Legislative Budget Leaders,

Meals on Wheels California (MOWCA) urgently implores you to reject the Administration’s May Revise proposal to cut senior nutrition programs in California by $8.5 million. While we certainly recognize the fiscal challenges facing our state as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope that policymakers will agree that the negative consequences of cutting senior nutrition services, especially during the pandemic, would far outweigh the savings to the state budget.

MOWCA is a state association affiliated with Meals on Wheels of America. Our mission is to create a unified voice of nutrition providers in California and broaden the impact of our programs to improve the lives of seniors, adults with disabilities and their families. We represent more than fifty agencies serving over 18 million meals a year statewide prior to COVID. Even with our current resources, the demand for nutrition providers has increased tremendously and is outpacing our capacity. A reduction in our resources would cause a profound reduction in our ability to increase our services to California’s older adults that are newly homebound due to their medical condition and fixed, limited incomes. Senior poverty and senior hunger had been deeply troubling community issues in California before COVID; now, with the pandemic, these issues are emerging crises. Cutting core, transactional tools like senior nutrition programs during this time would be a terrible and tragic mistake.
The $8.5 million dollar reduction to senior nutrition programs proposed in the Governor’s May Revision would cut California’s FY 20-21 increase to senior nutrition programs in half. Last year, after a decade of neglect from the state this program received state funding that boosted efforts to address the critically needed nutrition needs of seniors living in California. With COVID, California has even more home-bound seniors as the state appropriately encourages its vulnerable elders to stay home.

The dire consequences of these proposed cuts cannot be overstated. Food insecurity is linked to poor health status and malnutrition. Malnutrition can lead to loss of weight and strength and greater susceptibility to disease such as diabetes and stroke. Malnutrition also leads to increased visits to emergency rooms and increased hospital stays. These kinds of outcomes illustrate the value of senior nutrition programs during normal times; yet now, during COVID, the value of what senior nutrition programs can achieve and, importantly, avoid, is exponentially greater.

California has received some federal assistance to help meet the needs of the large increase of senior food needs, but this assistance falls short of meeting our state’s enormous need. Restaurant stimulus programs primarily funded with FEMA emergency dollars like “Great Plates Delivered” are exposing the ranks of seniors relying on government-funded meal programs during the crisis, but this program is short-term. There is as yet no plan for how to handle senior clients’ needs for meals once the short-term Great Plates Delivered Program abruptly ends with the Shelter-In-Place order. Now more than ever California needs to continue investing in these essential programs that keep California seniors healthy and safe. We therefore respectfully urge your leadership and support in ensuring the Legislature rejects these cuts so we can provide meals and services to our homebound, isolated seniors.

Sincerely,

Daryl Twerdahl
President