

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Heather Healy Stevens, a registered dietitian, living in Eliot, Maine. I work as a Public Health Analyst in federal government, for the Health Resources and Services Administration in the Bureau of Health Workforce. I am speaking on behalf of the Maine Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND), an organization of dietetic professionals who are the food and nutrition experts who translate the science of nutrition into practical solutions for healthy living. We are an affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a professional association with over 100,000 members. MAND members work throughout the state in hospitals, schools, public health clinics, nursing homes, food management, universities, research, and private practice. We are advocates for advancing the nutritional status of Mainers, Americans, and people around the world. We strive to improve the health of Maine's citizens through quality food and nutrition information and services.

I am providing written testimony in support of LD 472, An Act To Provide Meals to Homebound Individuals. This bill will provide ongoing funding to provide meals to homebound individuals and will leverage all federal funds available. This bill also ensures that a work group will be established in the Office of Aging and Disability Services within the Department of Health and Human Services. This workgroup shall research food access barriers, both regionally and statewide, and make recommendations about how to leverage resources to ensure regular, adequate nutrition for homebound individuals in the State and to forecast future demand and identify the appropriate level of funding in the future.

Fourteen percent of Maine seniors are food insecure. The Meals on Wheels program provides meals for adults 60 years and older and for disabled adults under age 60 who are unable to shop, prepare or cook meals for themselves. 4,400 Maine residents receive Meals on Wheels, another 16,600 eat at café sites. The meals are designed to meet one-third of the Federal Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) for a healthy and balanced diet. Meals are freshly prepared and ready to eat when convenient for participants. Meals on Wheels is dependent on General Fund allocations.

Malnutrition is under addressed in the US health system. One out of two older adults are at risk for malnutrition and disease-associated malnutrition costs are estimated at \$51.3 billion dollars annually. Malnutrition in older adults increases the length of hospital stays by four to six days, and up to 60% of hospitalized older adults may be malnourished. Maine's population has the highest median age in the country. Nineteen percent of Maine's population is over 65 years of age. This segment of our population is growing faster than the national average and in just 13 short years, by 2030, this percentage will swell to 28%, almost one-third of our State population. Disease prevention and health maintenance through good nutrition for the aging population provides an opportunity for improving quality of life and containing costs. Better nutrition and physical and mental activity can prevent many chronic diseases, yet many older adults, like the 14% of Maine seniors who are food insecure, do not consume a good-quality diet. Funding for the Meals on Wheels program reduces food insecurity among Maine seniors with meals that are nutritious and well-balanced. I urge you to support LD 472 to allow funding for meals for homebound individuals.

References:

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