



**New York State Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

272 Broadway
Albany, NY 12204
Ph. 518-449-7080
Fax 518-449-7055
office@nysaaaa.org
www.nysaaaa.org

**Senate Standing Committee on Aging
Senator Ruben Diaz, Sr, Chair**

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Testimony by:

New York State Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Good afternoon. My name is Laura Cameron and I am Executive Director of the New York State Association of Area Agencies on Aging. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. Our Association represents the 59 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) throughout New York State, and we are pleased to present our views on S. 3340.

Our Association extends our appreciation to Senator Diaz for his leadership and support of programs and services to assist older New Yorkers. We support efforts to fully fund home delivered meals under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and commend Senator Diaz for shining light on the importance of nutrition in health promotion and disease prevention for seniors in our State. The linkage between nutrition and health status are well-documented, including:

- Five of the top six chronic health conditions may be prevented, delayed or managed through improved nutrition services.

- Approximately 50% of older adults in hospitals and nursing homes are malnourished and may be discharged back into the community.
- The cost of a one-year supply of home-delivered meals is approximately equal to the cost of a day or two in the hospital.

AAAs throughout the state provide home-delivered meals, both directly and through subcontracts with local agencies. Data from AAAs shows that 34% of HDM clients statewide are over age 75, and the average age in many counties is over 80. Of all SNAP clients, 46% live alone. Many of them would be candidates for more costly levels of care if they weren't able to receive HDM and other forms of support from both the formal and informal service system. HDM is necessary to enable them to remain in their own homes and in the community. During State Fiscal Year 2007-08, SNAP funded 3.8 million HDMs and almost 700,000 congregate meals.

Eroding federal and state funds have resulted in county government adding significant local dollars to meet the ever-increasing demand for HDM as the population ages. Some counties report that they run out of SNAP funding in July or August of each year, then rely on local tax dollars to supplement funding for this program. Due to increased need and stagnant federal funding, there are waiting lists for HDM in many counties, mostly notably in larger counties such as Nassau (413), Suffolk (273), and Erie (106), totaling almost 800 for these three counties alone.

The rise in food, gas, and related costs has had an adverse impact on HDM in several ways. The program depends on the efforts of thousands of volunteers statewide, many of whom are on fixed incomes themselves. Many senior volunteers have had to cutback on the amount of time they can devote to HDM due to economic reasons. In addition, the HDM program has experienced a drop in the amount of funding received from client contributions as a result of the difficult economic conditions facing people on fixed incomes.

When you consider amendments to this bill, we encourage you to take the following into consideration:

- Phase-in funding over the course of two to three years to allow agencies time to build capacity for expanded service delivery.
- Ensure sufficient funds to invest in the infrastructure necessary to expand service delivery, such as kitchen equipment replacement and repairs, staff to conduct assessments, and costs associated with transporting meals.
- Many rural counties have areas that are hard to reach due to the distance and/or difficult driving conditions in inclement weather. In addition, there has been a need to pay people to deliver meals in the inner cities.
- Many Offices for the Aging rely on a cadre of volunteers to deliver meals, so a major expansion of HDM would require a multifaceted approach, including

recruitment/retention of volunteers, and supplementation with paid staff and/or utilization of stipends.

- Clarify language to ensure 100% state funding. The intent of this bill is to reduce the financial burden on local government, however, some county leaders have expressed concerns that creating a new section of the Elder Law for SNAP without an assurance of full funding would be viewed as an “unfunded mandate.”

Closing Statement

In closing, investing additional state funds to expand Home Delivered Meals under SNAP is a cost-effective alternative to more medically intensive and costly health care services. A few dollars spent now can significantly delay, and in some cases prevent, admissions to nursing homes and subsequent Medicaid eligibility. Seniors and their families want to use their resources wisely and keep their loved ones at home for as long as possible. Home Delivered Meals are critical to older New Yorkers are to remain safely and with dignity in their own homes.