

Administration on Aging Listening Session

Written Remarks, February 18, 2010

Regarding the Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act

Vinsen Faris, CFRE

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my thoughts on several important issues regarding the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. At the outset I cannot state strongly enough my belief that the Older Americans Act is a wonderful piece of federal legislation that works in ways far beyond what the crafters ever dreamed it would do! Because of the act many lives are positively touched across our country – those who receive direct services, those whose family members receive those very important services, and those who support all of these services by giving freely of their time, talents and treasures.

For example, with services such as home-delivered meals, the threat of hunger and food insecurity is greatly reduced for many older adults. It helps them to remain more healthy and to stay in their homes and out of costly care facilities. Family members can rest assured that their loved ones are not alone. Through caregiver services they can also get help and assurance in knowing that their challenges of dealing with an elderly family member are not unlike others in similar situations. And those who generously give of themselves to support these services know that their gifts are a solid investment not only for the present but for the future of our society. The Older Americans Act is truly what a public private partnership should be. Not only is it good public policy, but quite simply, supporting the Older Americans Act and its many services is the right thing to do.

Although the act is in my opinion more important and more relevant today than since its adoption, there are changes that can and should be made in order to improve upon its effectiveness. Three areas in particular should be changed in order to strengthen the act. First, more emphasis should be placed upon the importance of nutrition services. In my opinion, nutrition services are the single most important part of the act because they do the most good. Second, the Title III C should be combined into one nutrition services section, which would allow greater flexibility at the local and state level to address local needs. And third, language should be placed into the act that prohibits the transfer of funds away from nutrition services into other services.

Nutrition services should continue to be the foundation upon which all other services in the act are built. The critical link between nutrition and the prevention of chronic disease is a known fact. And yet long before the promotion of wellness became a popular concept, nutrition services programs were working to keep people healthy, and out of emergency rooms and skilled care facilities. From a public policy standpoint, nutrition services continue to be an excellent investment of federal dollars and our legislators understand this.

I mentioned previously that the Older Americans Act is truly what a public private partnership should be. Because the many services funded through the act are touching so many lives at the local level, many millions of local dollars and other local resources are brought together to assist our older Americans. This calls significant attention to the challenges our older seniors face which in turn brings more resources together to help those in need. There are few programs that have been as successful as this and none more so than programs like home-delivered meals. Nutrition services are the most important part of the Older Americans Act and therefore must remain the most visible part of the act.

Title III C should be combined into one nutrition services section, and not separated into congregate and home-delivered meals as the act currently reads. Having categories of C1 and C2 greatly limits the effectiveness of the act because of the top-down directive on how the federal dollars should be spent. While one of the greatest attributes of the Older Americans Act is that it allows and encourages local responses to local needs, separating nutrition services into two categories hampers it. Not all communities are alike. Where one community may see the need for more home-delivered meal services because of a large number of needy homebound individuals, another community may be fortunate to have more well elderly who can attend senior centers for congregate dining. From a public policy standpoint, giving the local communities the tools to address local needs makes sense. From a practical standpoint, lawmakers and the American public in general want this as well.

The Older Americans Act must have new language that prohibits the transfers of monies away from Title III nutrition services. Period. With 1 in 9 older adults at risk of hunger today – that's an astonishing number that exceeds 5 million people – all of the federal monies that are allocated for nutrition services must remain available for nutrition services. According to some rankings, Texas places fourth in food insecurity for older adults compared to the other states. In January I heard our state's

Commissioner of Agriculture state that he believed we had now reached the sad position of number two in senior hunger, which is something none of us should be proud of. And yet, in 2006, 3.37% of nutrition dollars were transferred away from nutrition services into Title III B services. In 2007, 9.01% of the federal nutrition dollars allocated to Texas were transferred. In 2008, over \$2 million dollars or 10.28% of the Older Americans Act nutrition allocation was transferred away from seriously needed nutrition services, while Texas was known to be one of the highest ranked states with senior hunger and food insecurity.

In 2006 while addressing the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, I told a Congressional subcommittee that Meals-on-Wheels of Johnson and Ellis Counties was doing great things in assisting our needy elderly residents, by helping them to stay healthy and in their homes and out of premature nursing home placements. I also told them we were serving the oldest, frailest, neediest people we had ever served, and that when we thought they could not be more poor, more frail, or more isolated, we unfortunately were proved wrong. And we were discovering that there were more and more people like them all of the time. This is even more the case today than four years ago. And it is like this all across Texas and all across America. That is why I ask that consideration be given to improving the effectiveness of the Older Americans Act by:

- increasing the emphasis on nutrition services,
- combining Title III C into one nutrition services section, and
- prohibiting the transfer of nutrition funding to other services.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my suggestions. If I may address any of these in more detail or explain them further, please do not hesitate to call.

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EDUCATION

- Master of Public Administration, School of Urban and Public Affairs, University of Texas at Arlington, 1993
- Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, University of Texas at Arlington, 1978

PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

- Certified Professional Fundraiser (CFRE), CFRE International

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Meals on Wheels Association of Texas, President
- Meals on Wheels Association of America, Past Member of Board and Executive Committee
- Association of Fundraising Professionals
- Fort Worth Metro Chapter of Association of Fundraising Professionals, Director of Scholarships
- Partnership for Philanthropic Planning
- Texas Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs, Past President
- Tarrant Area Gerontological Society
- Center for Nonprofit Management, Consultant

RECOGNITION

- Outstanding Professional Award, Texas Association of Aging Programs, 2004

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Attended and presented at numerous conferences, seminars, and workshops:
 - philanthropy
 - board development
 - governance
 - nonprofit management
 - fundraising
 - aging services
 - nutrition
 - volunteer management
 - technology
 - grant writing

CIVIC ACTIVITIES

- Public Transportation Advisory Committee of the Texas Transportation Commission, Past Member
- Member and Past President, Burleson Rotary Club

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

- Executive Director, Meals-on-Wheels of Johnson and Ellis Counties, 1988 to present
- Vice President, Faris Ranch Management, LLC, 2002 to present
- Owner/Operator, Triple C Productions dba Cade's Cafe and Catering, 1982 to 1988