

Jane Doroff
Council on Aging
Sonoma County California
Testimony for AoA OAA Reauthorization
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Good afternoon Madame Secretary, and participants from throughout the aging network. I am Jane Doroff a Registered Dietitian and a Director of the Council on Aging Senior Meals Program in Sonoma County California.

It is a pleasure and an honor to be here today representing a local senior nutrition program. I applaud the Listening Forums dialogue well in advance of congressional action on the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. Doing so focuses our attention on matters that have an impact on the lives of our nation's elderly everyday, not just during that period of time when legislators turn their attention to the statute.

I have seen first hand the benefits of the Older American Acts programs. I have worked in this field for the past 14 years as well as in healthcare prior to working with the MOW program. Our agency provides a multitude of services to seniors in our community. We measure our success by keeping seniors in their homes as long as possible or until to death. It sounds rather morbid however we know that by simply providing the basic requirements such as food and housing we can keep elders from being prematurely institutionalized resulting in increased financial burdens placed on the states. Comparison of cost of moneys spent on community based organizations & healthcare: ~\$6,000/year for home dwelling elder (CBSO's) vs. \$30-40,000/year institutionalized elder. The choice is simple by providing case management & meals we can achieve keeping the elder in their home. Our Title IIIC programs provide the safety net for so many – not just the elder but the adult children. They rely on this program to be the eyes, ears and protectors of their loved ones.

My focus this afternoon is on Title IIIC funding & flexibility with in the system. In California, we have been ranked 18th nationally for senior hunger. That means prevention and wellness and healthy aging are simply out of reach for many seniors. In our County we have a greater aging population then the national average it is at 21%.

The two major recommendations that I will put forth are simple and are inline with MOWAA, and other national organizations. I will reference MOWAA in this written statement.

I believe that:

1. Food is a basic necessity;
2. There is a direct, and scientifically demonstrable, relationship between nutrition and health;
3. Good nutrition contributes to the prevention, treatment and/or delay of onset of many of the most common chronic medical conditions in the elderly, such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, for example; and
4. Hunger is a disease, and we have the cure for it today.

If we agree on those four fundamental points, then I hope that we can agree that the Older Americans Act should be one of the primary vehicles through which we deliver the cure to the deleterious disease called hunger – and prevent so many other diseases as well. I hope we will agree that we need to make changes in the Act during reauthorization that will contribute more effectively to the eradication of hunger.

A first recommendation for changes in the Older Americans Act is ***in agreement with MOWAA the consolidation of Titles III C 1 and III C 2 into a single Title III C.*** This would eliminate the administrative burdens of intra-title transfers. States, Area Agencies on Aging and Senior Nutrition Programs could more easily direct nutrition dollars to areas of greatest need. There would be no change in what entities are eligible for funding, who could receive services, how clients are served, etc. Both congregate and home-delivered meal programs would continue to have access to these dollars, and the process of directing them where they need to go would be simplified. As we know the cost of providing home delivered meals is greater and the request for MOW continues to grow every year.

The second recommendation is to ***Eliminate the authority to transfer funds from Title III C to Title III B, and vice-versa.*** This is not a new position for MOWAA and supported by its members but is now supported by the data through NASIP.

It may be argued that the transfers have benefits but why then is that the states who transfer the greatest amount from Title III C to Title III B have shown a marked increase in elder hunger? Over the course of the most recent three years for which we have data, net transfers into Title III B from III C have grown significantly from approximately 9.6 percent, or just over \$33 million dollars, to about 11.4 percent or nearly \$40 million. That is real growth and that lost nutrition funding could have furnished hundreds of thousands of additional meals at a time when hunger risk is growing.

The adoption of these two recommendations would entirely eliminate transfer within the Act. It would clearly identify where the need is and our role as providers meeting our mission statement *“to enhance the quality of life for Sonoma County aging community by providing services that promote well-being and maintain independence.”*

We call upon you, Madame Secretary, and the entire aging network to stand with us in this modernization of the Older Americans Act. For our part, we pledge to stand with you in taking our individual and collective cases to the Hill to request adequate funding levels for all Title III services and for the Act as a whole.

We can take a giant leap in that direction now and in 2011 by asking Congress to enact these straightforward changes to the Older Americans Act bringing it into the 21st century and meeting the needs of our most vulnerable population who built this Country and now need our assistance.

In closing, I'd like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you and ask you to remember that the providers of these programs rely on you to make the appropriate decisions so that they can continue to meet the demands of our aging population effectively.