

Madame Chair and members of the committee, my name is Jim Streeter and I am from Missoula

I am here today to speak in support of increasing the Aging Services budget to 10 million dollars for the biennium. I am in support of this because I am and have been a Meals on Wheels driver for approximately 8 ½ years. I have driven all this time on the same route, which covers approximately 55 miles and takes about 2 hours.

Each of my neighbors that I deliver to receive a hot meal and is catered somewhat to their particular needs and wants, they may not be able to eat turkey, they just do not like green bean or they are on a low salt or low sugar diet. Because of their physical disabilities, these meals allow them to stay in their own homes. One of my neighbors is 88 years old, living in the same house for almost 50 years and is confined to a wheel chair. She told me that if it was not for Meals on Wheels, she could not stay in her home because she cannot cook anything on the stove. The wheel chair places her head at the level of the pans and she cannot lift anything off the stove. In Missoula, if you call for home delivered meals, they will start the next day. When my mother in law fell in another state and we were trying to arrange for home delivered meals for her, we were told that if she could pay for them, then they would start tomorrow, if she could not pay, she would have to wait 6 weeks.

Besides delivering the meals, I also provide other services that may not be apparent to everyone. I will see and talk to the neighbor, which may be the only contact they have all day. This daily contact brings some relieve to relatives and friends knowing that the neighbor has daily contact. These neighbors become our friends and I can see changes in their actions or moods that may warrant further investigation, I have called 911 twice in behave of two of my delivery neighbors. They were taken to the hospital and stayed there until they died. While in the hospital, the relatives could have their last time together and make any needed arrangements. The neighbors may be such a state that they cannot or will not call for help. When my mother in law had her stroke, she was wearing a call button but never pushed the button. She had the button on when they carried her out and we received the button from the hospital when she died.

I provide conversation to some of the neighbors. Since again, I may be the only person they see all day, they are delighted to have someone to talk to. During these conversations, I can inform the neighbor of other possible resources that is available to them, for example senior companions or an organization to build a ramp for them so they can physically get in and out of their home.

For my hospice neighbors that I deliver to, I provide a relief to their care givers in time and duties.

Staying in your home until the last moment is a strong feeling most of us have. My mother in law was going to have to be carried out of her home, which they finally did. One of my former neighbors had no where to live so some of his friends let him stay in a shack that had electricity but no running water. He had a portable outhouse by the front door. Meals on Wheels gave him the opportunity to stay in a place "of his own" until he died. I deliver on Tuesday and the Thursday driver found him dead in his bed one day.

Thank you for listening to my testimony and again, please provide the funding to continue these important services.