

October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023

The Honorable Jared Polis  
Governor, State of Colorado  
136 State Capital Building  
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Governor Polis:

As you consider funding priorities for the FY 2024-25 budget, we strongly encourage an increase in General Fund to support State Funding for Senior Services. Colorado is one of the fastest aging states in the country. Currently, one in five Coloradans is age 60 and older, but in Mesa County, one in four residents is age 60 and older. The surge in demand for services over the last several years, means increased State funding for Senior Services is particularly important now and in the years to come.

To meet this need, we urge you to prioritize an increase in the state's investment in community-based services for Colorado's older adults. Specifically, as part of your FY 2024-25 budget proposal, we respectfully request an increase in General Fund support for the State Funding for Senior Services line item in the Department of Human Services. This request has three elements:

1. A General Fund "base" increase of \$5 million to help address the current unmet need.
2. Classification of the State Funding for Senior Services line item as a "community provider", thereby ensuring that the line item will be considered for annual inflationary increases.
3. A statutory proposal to review the adequacy of funding for the line item every five years.

The critical services to older Coloradans include congregate meal services, home-delivered meals (i.e., "Meals on Wheels"), transportation, supportive services, activities to promote socialization and wellness at senior centers, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, and family caregiver support. The demand for these programs has grown significantly over the last several years and is only expected to increase.

Locally, we have three Long-Term Care Ombudsman covering 34 assisted living and skilled nursing facilities. If all facilities are full, 1,781 residents could be trying to access advocacy services through our Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

Currently, Mesa County Meals on Wheels has 87 individuals on a waiting list. One particular individual on the waitlist is a 95-year-old veteran who endured a recent leg amputation. The State must recognize the need to dramatically increase funding for these services to meet the ongoing and rising needs due to the rapidly aging population.

We realize you face difficult fiscal constraints and ask that you please consider this request for additional and sustainable funding to support the growing older Coloradan population. Our older adults deserve to age with dignity, health and independence.

Sincerely,