



Dan Vought
Simply EZ Home Delivered Meals
Budget Testimony – Senate Health Committee
May 5, 2021

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the State Operating budget. My name is Dan Vought and I am the Director of Operations at Simply EZ Home Delivered Meals.

Simply EZ was founded in 1997 in Mansfield, OH as a small local company providing nutritious food options to our community. Serving one county, with one van, and one driver was a humble beginning to a company that now offers distribution centers in Columbus, Toledo, and Akron. Today, we are a woman owned, for-profit business that has over 120 employees serving over 155,000 meals to 5,000 customers per month in 77 counties throughout Ohio. Our philosophy is simply defined in two words, "Choice" and "Independence."

We first want to thank and commend Director McElroy and the Ohio Department of Aging for their work on creating the Strategic Action Plan on Aging, also known as the SAPA. For the first time in the aging community, the SAPA provides a road map for coordination and alignment of these incredibly valuable resources and programs to truly get at ways to maximize the vital resources provided to older Ohioans. The ability to be flexible with these funds will be vital to address the needs of our older Ohioans. While we clearly fit within the SAPA priority to provide nutrition services to older Ohioans, we also can help the state achieve other goals such as community connections. Our employees are frequently the only face that many older Ohioans see in a day. We can use these interactions and observations to better inform other entities and help identify and prevent the possibility of further health care expenses.

We want to provide you some background on the funding history for home delivered meals. Home delivered meals had an increase slated in the last operating budget (HB 166), but that language was vetoed by the Governor. In fact, home delivered meals was the only home and community-based service that did not receive an increase in the previous budget. Importantly, the Medicaid fee for service rate was actually **DECREASED** from \$6.99 per meal to \$6.50.

The last time home delivered meals had an increase, it was for 1.5% (about 9 cents) in 2009, 12 years ago. Like all businesses, home delivered meal providers have seen significant increases in fuel, labor, food, packaging, and delivery costs. The budget before you provides for a rate of \$7.20 per meal. We truly appreciate your attention to this important funding.

It is crucial that home delivered meal funding is available to for-profit businesses as well as non-profits. While non-profit home delivered meal providers do wonderful work, a business dedicated to this mission can be more creative and reach many areas that non-profit providers cannot. For example, as many members of the General Assembly understand, reaching Appalachian older Ohioans in Southeast Ohio is extremely difficult. Due to the rural nature of the area and distance, many non-profit providers cannot reach these people. Utilizing FedEx, Simply EZ provides choice and high-quality nutritious meals to this southern district. These services are extremely important, but also very costly. Without the requested increase in funding, reaching these populations will become even more difficult, if not impossible. For-profit providers create jobs, provide health insurance, offer more choice and variety for consumers and do not get the many benefits that non-profits can realize, such as additional government grants and discounts on food and supplies.

We ask that you support the Department of Aging's funding request for the Statewide Aging Initiative that was contained in the Executive version of the budget. This program will be used to support the SAPA and the services and activities designated by the Department of Aging, and more importantly provides the ability of the department to fill the gaps that occur in services and support to our most vulnerable older Ohioans. The House removed the Statewide Aging Initiative line item that provides this vital flexibility to make needed adjustments. We ask you to restore this vital line item and the flexibility that comes with it. This line item can revolutionize the way flexible funding is provided to these vital home and community-based services.

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the committee, again thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.