

# Increasing access to Meals on Wheels for veterans (HF3005)



## The Issue

Last year Metro Meals on Wheels (MMOW) members served nearly 1.7 million meals to 9,844 individuals. Included in that number were more than 200 veterans in the Twin Cities served through the Meals for Veterans program. Since the program was approved by the Minnesota Legislature in 2023, it's served 278 veterans a total of 28,206 meals. Many veterans don't meet the age, income or disability criteria that would help them cover the cost of meals through other programs. This program has provided them with access to healthy food and a social connection.

Continued funding for this program will ensure veterans at risk of food insecurity and social isolation can receive meals. Funding for this program expires June 30 and we are asking the Legislature to renew funding to continue this service for veterans.

## Legislation

The Meals for Veterans Bill (HF3005) would provide \$995,540 in renewed funding over the next two fiscal years to serve Meals on Wheels to veterans of any age in the Metro Meals on Wheels service area. The funding would go to the Department of Veterans Affairs and reporting on the use of funds is required.

## Goals of the program

- 🤝 Enroll veterans as volunteers to deliver portion of meals (Veterans Helping Veterans)
- 🤝 Annually provide more than 200 veterans daily meal service
- 🤝 MMOW works with the VA to identify recipients
- 🤝 Aid VA's Suicide Prevention Program by reducing social isolation
- 🤝 Report on outreach activities, service units, and recipient demographics

## For more information

To learn more about this issue, visit [meals-on-wheels.com/advocacy](https://www.meals-on-wheels.com/advocacy).





April 1, 2025

Representative David Gottfried  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor Centennial Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Gottfried,

I write this letter in support of the proposal to provide funding for home-delivered meals for Veterans. As the Agency on Aging for the seven-county metropolitan region, we know the need for nutritious meals is great for Veterans of all ages. This unique proposal helps to focus services on people who may otherwise be unserved due to lack of eligibility for other programs.

Nutritious meals delivered on a regular basis to Veterans who have difficulty obtaining and preparing food will help them manage chronic conditions and live healthier lives. Upstream services for Veterans such as home-delivered meals delay or may even eliminate the need for more costly care. Veterans also benefit from contact with the person who delivers their meals, helping to reduce isolation and loneliness.

Thank you for being a champion for Veterans to help them thrive at home and in the community.

Sincerely,

Dawn Simonson  
President and CEO  
dsimonson@trellisconnects.org

March 31, 2025

Veterans and Military Affairs Division Committee

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,



I am writing to you as the Executive Director of Metro Meals on Wheels, the association of Meals on Wheels providers in the Twin Cities area. Meals on Wheels has been in our communities for over 50 years providing nutritious, well-balanced meals to our older neighbors and people living with disabilities. Meals on Wheels is only possible because of neighbors helping neighbors, volunteers take time out of their day to serve neighbors in need, while others donate resources to help make sure no one falls through the cracks.

In the last biennium, this committee was thoughtful enough to provide funding for us to bring those nutritious, ready-to-eat meals to our aging veterans facing food insecurity in Ramsey, Hennepin and Anoka Counties. With the assistance of MNVA and MACV, we've been able to connect with over 275 individuals and provide 28,000 meals in the last year and a half. We are currently serving 182 veterans daily.

Meals on Wheels is especially important for aging veterans, many of whom face unique challenges as they grow older. Many veterans live on fixed incomes, often relying on limited social security benefits or pensions. As a result, they may struggle to afford nutritious meals, particularly as the cost of food, housing and healthcare continues to rise.

In addition to the physical benefits, Meals on Wheels also plays a critical role in addressing the emotional and social isolation that many aging veterans face. After serving their country, some veterans find themselves isolated from their peers or family, which can lead to loneliness and depression. Meals on Wheels programs offer more than just food—they provide regular human interaction, which can significantly improve a senior's mental health. For many veterans, the daily delivery of a meal also a reminder that they are valued and cared for, ensuring they feel connected to their communities even as they age.

By passing HFXXX this committee will provide the resources to continue serving veterans in need at our current level for the next two years. I urge you to think of our older adults who have served, who now face the challenge of increasing costs for food and housing. Please help make sure that they get at least one complete meal and a visit from a friendly volunteer each day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick Rowan", is written over a white background.

Patrick Rowan

Executive Director

Metro Meals on Wheels

[patrick@meals-on-wheels.com](mailto:patrick@meals-on-wheels.com)



Greetings, Chair and members. My name is Dr. Kristy Janigo, The American Legion Department of Minnesota Legislative Chair, as well as the legislative chair for the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers. The Commander's Task Force of which the Legion is a member, along with seven other Congressionally chartered veterans service organizations, has unanimously chosen food insecurity as one of their five key legislative priorities this year. HF XXXX is continued funding to Metro Meals on Wheels to server veterans in the three largest

Minnesota counties.

State lawmakers took a big bite out of the problem in the last biennium, with \$540,000 per year in legislative funding to Metro Meals on Wheels for Hennepin, Anoka, and Ramsey Counties. This funding needs to continue. As an assistant county veterans service officer supporting formerly homeless and justice involved veterans in the metro area, I've signed up several veterans for the meals funded under this appropriation. One of my Post-911 veterans was navigating justice involvement in the 4<sup>th</sup> District Veterans Treatment Court program, as well as severe mental health concerns. After we saved his house from foreclosure through the successful delivery of veteran grants and benefits, we set up the meals on wheels to further stabilize his life. A senior Vietnam era veteran who had been homeless and living out of his van for months finally received an apartment through HUD-VASH, and as early as his first full week there, he had meals regularly brought to his home. This is a near immediate, low barrier, and tangible way to deliver support.

You have already heard about our support for HF 2773, the funding for the other 84 counties in Minnesota. Between these two bills, we can take care of all Minnesota veterans with funding sources to ensure geography will not impact which veterans go hungry. Because one hungry veteran is too many. Thank you.

-Dr. Kristy Janigo

**Contact:** Kristy Janigo, The American Legion Department of Minnesota, Minnesota Association of County Veteran Service Officers Legislative Chair, **Phone:** 612-708-9029 **Email:** Kristy.janigo@gmail.com

My name is Johnny Ball. I am a 73-year-old, Vietnam era disabled vet. My service included traveling up and down the West Coast, from Vancouver to San Deigo. I was two years overseas. I was in and out of the Philippine Islands, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, and of course, Vietnam.

I served on a supply ship, the AFS 7. It was in Vietnam where I came in contact with Agent Orange. Now in my old age I am suffering from that contact. I have several debilitating diseases from that experience. It is no longer an easy task to do sustained grocery trips. I do a lot of short trips to my local Kwik Trip. As you may be aware, this can get very expensive. I live on my Vet's disability and Social Security.

And it is for this reason, I depend on Meals On Wheels. Not only do they deliver seven frozen meals to me every Wednesday, but they do it for free. Honestly, I don't know how I would get by without those meals. Being a diabetic, the food also provides me with healthy choices. They provide me with the proper portions. And my deliveries are as regular as clockwork. The people who deliver my meals sometimes do it in storms, both winter and summer. They do it out of the goodness of their hearts, proving there are still good people in the world. They use their vehicles and pay their own gas.

To sum up, I urge you as a veteran who has voted in every election since I could legally do so, to vote to re-fund. My story is just one of hundreds. We veterans depend on Meals on Wheels for our very existence. Please do the right thing, re-fund Meals on Wheels.

Sincerely,

Johnny Ball

Anoka, MN

651 329 2238