

Janet Billotte

Testimony before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

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Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Braun, and Members of the Committee, thank you for having me here today at your Older Americans Act hearing. My name is Janet Billotte, I am 78 years old. I live in West Decatur, Pennsylvania, which is a rural town in Clearfield County. Before retiring, I worked as a nursing aide. I am here to share my experiences as a recipient of Meals on Wheels and other services from the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging.

I have been receiving Meals on Wheels for four years. My husband, Richard, and I started receiving meals in August of 2020, during the pandemic. Let me tell you, it is so nice to receive these meals. Every time I get a box, it always feels like I get a little present. You always get milk, sometimes cookies, and if it was summer, sometimes we get a strawberry shortcake. Last year, I was diagnosed with Stage 3 colon cancer and I was also caring for my husband who had been sick with many issues for a long time. I also just had an operation for my cancer and had chemotherapy three times a week. Many days, I didn't feel well and it was very helpful to have these meals delivered to us.

And I love talking to Fred, the meal delivery person. Every day he comes in and always asks me how I am. Everywhere he delivers, he checks on everyone—it is wonderful that he does these check ins. If he doesn't hear from someone, he calls the Area Agency on Aging and they make sure we are okay. A lot of older people don't have family around. I don't have family around. I had two brothers, but they passed away and my husband just passed recently. The Area Agency on Aging is my family.

Today, my cancer is in remission. I am still receiving deliveries from Meals on Wheels and also use other services from the Area Agency on Aging. They do this very nice thing where they give us vouchers through the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program run by the Agriculture Department so that we can go to the farmer's market and I can get fresh produce. I get tomatoes, lettuce, and all kinds of fresh foods from the market. It is good nutrition, and it's good for preventing cancer. During bad weather, they also do a "blizzard box", where they send you a box of frozen and shelf-stable food so we have something to eat when we are stuck in bad weather. I really am thankful for these services because I'm not sure what I would do without them.

Beyond meal deliveries, I also participated in events at the senior center. One time, I went on a field trip to a mushroom farm, where we learned about all the different types of mushrooms. We also went to a flower farm. I love flowers and have always had a flower garden. The Area Agency on Aging also helped coordinate transportation for me when I had to go to the clinic to get chemotherapy. I had to get chemo and blood work every week, and that was terrible. Because I live in a rural area, it was very hard to find transportation to the clinic but they were very kind to help drive me to my doctor's appointment.

I'm very grateful to be receiving these services, and grateful for the friendship I have with my Area Agency on Aging. Kathy Gillespie, who is with the Area Agency on Aging, is like family to me. I know many older adults who receive Meals on Wheel are thankful like I am. I also understand that there are many more older adults on the waiting list for these services. I ask you to please help more people get into the program and be able to receive these great services. Thank you again for the opportunity to share my story.