Testimony of Kimberly Gallo, October 2, 2021 House Committee on Veteran's Affairs
"Ending Veteran Hunger: Examining the impact of Food insecurity"

- A variety of important programs helped to support veterans during the pandemic. Nutrition programs were among the most critical. At a time when it was not safe for vulnerable residents to venture into public places to purchase food, County-sponsored meal programs stepped in to provide essential nutritional support while keeping people safe.
- The collective efforts of numerous organizations made it possible for senior dining centers to shift to provide home-delivered meals and pick-up meal service to thousands of residents, including veterans. In fact, senior nutrition providers quadrupled the number of home-delivered and pick up meals from 100,000 to 400,000 in June 2020 alone.
- Local restaurants played a key role, as well, through their participation in the Great Plates program.
- Great Plates paired local restaurants with older adults and people living with disabilities to bring healthy meals straight to their homes. Through Great Plates, over 8,300 older adults and persons with disabilities were served.
- Mr. Scott is one such veteran who is grateful for the support he received through Great Plates. A Navy Veteran who was discharged from the military with a 100% disability rating, Mr. Scott lives alone on a fixed income.
- During the pandemic, he suddenly became the primary caregiver for his 29-year-old son living with severe Autism when his ex-wife was no longer able to care for him. He wasn't prepared for the financial and physical demands of his new caregiving role, and he struggled to prepare nutritious meals for his son.
- Mr. Scott came across a newspaper ad for the Great Plates program and applied.
- He soon began receiving one meal a day (at no cost) for both himself and his son.
- This helped take some of the stress away from his role as he could count on receiving filling and nutritious meals in the safety of his home.
- This helped out financially, too. Unfortunately, all of his son's benefits had lapsed by the time his son was placed in his care and Mr. Scott had to navigate the process to reinstate support. Covid-19 made it more difficult as most services were not available in person.
- Great Plates gave Mr. Scott the support he and his son needed to stay healthy during the pandemic. The program dramatically reduced his stress and the financial strain of being a caregiver.
- Today, Mr. Scott's son is thriving at a residential facility for adults with special needs. Mr. Scott is grateful for the support provided by the County and the Great Plates program as he navigated a difficult time in his life.