

# Testimony of John Offerdahl

## U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

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Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the Committee — It is an honor to speak with you today about an issue affecting millions of older Americans: ensuring that seniors can age in place with dignity, safety, independence, and meaningful human connection. This is important every day of the year, but especially during the holiday season, when social isolation and food insecurity among older adults rise sharply.

### Introduction

As mentioned, my name is John Offerdahl. I became a proud resident of Broward County 40 years ago, when drafted by the Miami Dolphins in 1986. I spent my entire eight-year NFL career in South Florida, and for 36 of those 40 years, my wife Lynn and I have owned and operated regional restaurant chains, which we continue to run today. Throughout these decades, we have remained deeply involved in charitable work across South Florida—including through our Offerdahl's Hand-Off Foundation.

### Background and COVID Experience

Now you ask, how does an NFL linebacker become an Older American Act Home Delivered Meal service provider for the Area Agency on Aging of Broward County? Let me tell you the story!

The **Hand-Off Meals for Seniors** program was born during the onset of the COVID pandemic, when Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross reached out to several of his Miami Dolphins alumni players, who were also restaurateurs, to help produce &

## **Testimony of John Offerdahl**

### **U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging**

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deliver \$1MM of weekly emergency meals to families and seniors in the neighborhoods surrounding Hard Rock Stadium. With additional support from generous partners, we delivered more than one million meals across Broward County – many for homebound seniors.

In the years that followed, emergency COVID funding through the Area Agency on Aging of Broward County and the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, allowed us to continue this work. By 2022, our team had delivered hundreds of thousands of FRESH meals to vulnerable seniors & families who needed them most.

These experiences revealed a truth still urgent today: homebound seniors are a hidden population, often forgotten, isolated, and deeply in need of dependable nutrition and meaningful human contact.

### **A New Model for Home-Delivered Meals**

The success of this effort led the Area Agency on Aging of Broward County—under the leadership of current CEO, Charlotte Mather-Taylor—to rethink its 48-year Older American Act home-delivered meals program. Rather than awarding one contract to the lowest-cost frozen meal provider, the Agency on Aging awarded competitive contracts to multiple service providers. This ultimately offered variety and choice to Broward County homebound seniors.

## Testimony of John Offerdahl

### U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

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Our foundation's program, **Hand-Off Meals for Seniors**, was selected in 2023 for a six-month pilot contract based on our proven ability to deliver fresh, restaurant-quality meals paired with compassionate, relationship-centered service. Seniors responded with overwhelming appreciation, and on January 1, 2024, our program was one of four service providers in Broward County awarded a five-year Older American Act Home Delivered Meals contract.

Today, **Hand-Off Meals for Seniors** is the leading service provider in Broward County delivering more than **4,500 fresh home-delivered meals and wellness visits every week to over 450 homebound seniors** across Broward County.

### Why the Older Americans Act Matters

Broward County reflects the future of our nation. Florida has one of the highest concentrations of seniors in America, and Broward's population of adults over 85 is projected to increase by **169%** over the next 25 years.

Vulnerable, homebound seniors often live alone, without family, caregivers, transportation, or the ability to shop and cook making the need for support so huge that the Area Agency on Aging maintains a long waiting list underscoring the urgent need for strong, sustained investment in the Older Americans Act.

The choice between aging in the community or entering institutional care often hinges on access to **basic supports**.

# Testimony of John Offerdahl

## U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

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**Allow me to highlight 5 “Basic Support” takeaways we have learned in Broward County for the Committee to consider:**

- 1. Healthy competition among meal providers drives better quality, service and outcomes** – Providers like us are food-centric—not large industrial frozen-meal brokers. Most meals we deliver offer FRESH salads, sandwiches, fruits, and vegetables vs institutionalized frozen tv meals. While FRESH ingredients & real time production are more expensive, local production in scattered restaurant locations across Broward County create decentralized pickup points that make the system efficient and sustainable.
- 2. Healthy competition among meal providers inspires innovation and efficiencies that mitigate costs** – Providers can leverage a restaurant’s purchasing power, fixed costs, and community commitment to provide high-quality meals at sustainable rates—discounting profits in service of the community-based mission.
- 3. Healthy competition among meal providers invigorates stronger public-private partnerships** – Funding partnerships have expanded, supported by organizations like the Jim Moran Foundation, Community Foundation of Broward, Miami Dolphins Foundation, and Publix Charities to help cover the gap between public funds & the elevated costs of restaurant quality, FRESH meals.

# Testimony of John Offerdahl

## U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging

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- 4. Healthy competition among meal providers engages the soul** – A meal in our model is never just a meal. Delivery drivers visit the same seniors each week, building trust and companionship. These visits are also the moments when someone notices memory decline, hazardous living conditions, or failing appliances.
- 5. Healthy competition among meal providers gives seniors the CHOICE!** – Seniors retain personal for their choice of meals!

### Conclusion

This is the kind of improvement we all hope to see from government programs: invigorated partnerships, better outcomes, more choice, and an “age in place” option for seniors that will cost less and be more innovative, responsive and personal, than institutionalized care. **Healthy competition among meal providers is good for the body & soul of our aging in place seniors... during the holidays and beyond!**

At every level, this work is a public-private partnership—and the Older Americans Act is the backbone of the team. As Coach Shula taught us, “In life as in football... it takes a team.”

## **Testimony of John Offerdahl**

### **U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging**

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Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the Committee: aging in place is not merely a policy objective—it reflects who we are as a nation. The **Hand-Off Meals for Seniors** program demonstrates what becomes possible when FRESH, high-quality nutrition is paired with consistent human connection and allowed to compete for the body & soul of our senior.

I invite every member of this Committee to visit us in Broward County, meet our volunteers, talk with our seniors, and join my wife and me for one of our weekly meal deliveries. I give you my promise—you will be inspired!

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to strengthening the golden years of America's older adults.