



April 19, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the Medicare Rights Center, I am writing to thank you for the provisions in the FY18 omnibus appropriations bill that will improve the health and economic security of older adults, people with disabilities, their families, and caregivers.

The Medicare Rights Center is a national, nonprofit organization that works to ensure access to affordable health care for older adults and people with disabilities through counseling and advocacy, educational programs, and public policy initiatives. Our organization provides services and resources to nearly three million people with Medicare, family caregivers, and health care professionals each year.

We are pleased that the final spending bill partially restores funding cut from the Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) in FY17. This will allow the SHIP program's community-based counselors—most of whom are highly-trained volunteers—to continue to provide one-on-one, unbiased, personalized advice to Medicare beneficiaries, helping them understand their rights and navigate their coverage options. With 10,000 people becoming eligible for Medicare each day, an adequately funded SHIP program is needed now more than ever.¹

We also thank you for increasing funding for other programs important to people with Medicare, including the Older Americans Act's critical home and community-based services, improvements to customer service for Social Security beneficiaries, and initiatives to help older adults, people with disabilities, and their families access affordable housing.

In addition to these much-needed funding increases, we welcome the bill's preservation of recent legislative changes that will close the Medicare Part D donut hole one year earlier and provide beneficiaries in the coverage gap with a higher discount on their prescription drugs. However, we are disappointed that Congress did not seek to further improve the Medicare program by including in the spending package legislation that

¹ Pew Research Center, "Baby Boomers Retire" (last visited March 1, 2018), <http://www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2010/12/29/baby-boomers-retire/>

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would modernize and simplify the Medicare Part B enrollment process. Similarly, we had hoped lawmakers would seize this opportunity to reauthorize the successful Medicaid Money Follows the Person (MFP) program, which since 2007 has helped over 75,000 people with Medicaid, many of whom also rely on Medicare, transition from nursing facilities back to the community.² We urge you to take up these bipartisan, bicameral bills—the BENES Act (S. 1909; H.R. 2575) and the EMPOWER Care Act (S. 2227; H.R. 5306), respectively,—without delay.

We are also disappointed that Congress did not reach a bipartisan agreement to stabilize the health insurance markets, but appreciate that the omnibus does not erode the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA) consumer protections or expand the availability of insurance options that do not adhere to the health law’s consumer protection standards. We remain concerned that recent proposals to so do, such as those to increase access to short-term limited duration plans, would create additional barriers to care for the millions of older adults and people with disabilities who purchase individual coverage on the ACA markets, and for whom the law’s protections for people with preexisting conditions are especially important. We ask you to move forward in a way that will protect and strengthen these consumer standards as well as access to affordable, comprehensive care.

In closing, we applaud the commitment to older adults and people with disabilities demonstrated in many of the provisions outlined above, among others. Looking ahead, we ask that you keep and build upon this commitment by rejecting efforts to rescind agreed-upon funds in FY18, and by advancing FY19 funding levels that prioritize the health, dignity, and independence of all Americans. If you have any questions, please contact Lindsey Copeland, Federal Policy Director, at lcopeland@medicarerights.org or 202-637-0961. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Joe Baker
President
Medicare Rights Center

cc:

The Honorable Orrin Hatch, Chair, Senate Committee on Finance
The Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Finance
The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chair, Senate Committee on Health, Education Labor & Pensions
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education Labor & Pensions
The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chair, Senate Appropriations Labor/HHS Subcommittee

² Medicaid.gov, “Money Follows the Person” (last visited March 1, 2018), <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/ltss/money-follows-the-person/index.html>.

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Labor/HHS Subcommittee
The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair, House Appropriations Labor/HHS Subcommittee
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Labor/HHS Subcommittee
The Honorable Greg Walden, Chair, House Committee on Energy & Commerce
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy & Commerce
The Honorable Kevin Brady, Chair, House Committee on Ways & Means
The Honorable Richard Neal, Ranking Member, House Committee on Ways & Means
The Honorable Susan Collins, Chair, Senate Special Committee on Aging
The Honorable Bob Casey, Ranking Member, Senate Special Committee on Aging