

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health, and Human Services, Education  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you work on the fiscal year (FY) 2021 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, we ask that you provide adequate funding for the Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). SHIP provides essential assistance to seniors, as well as people with disabilities, in accessing their earned Medicare benefits. Even maintaining level funding at a time when the number of older Americans is growing by 10,000 a day means that SHIP would be limited in their ability to meet ongoing needs. We urge you to reject proposals to cut or eliminate these vital services by investing in SHIP at no less than \$70 million in the FY 2021 bill.

SHIPs provide older Americans, people with disabilities, and their families with unbiased, cost-free, and personalized information to help them navigate Medicare enrollment and obtain benefits. The average Medicare beneficiary must choose between 60 Medicare plan options each year. They have difficulty comparing plan benefits and making a selection that takes into account all the factors that impacts out-of-pocket costs and network access. Without the independent counseling and assistance that SHIPs provide, seniors and people with disabilities may make choices that are not right for them, leaving them with high out-of-pocket costs and limited access. Our offices know that Medicare is often confusing to our constituents, and we have relied on SHIPs to help provide them with the answers they need.

SHIPs operate in every state, territory, and the District of Columbia. They provide enrollment clinics, “Welcome to Medicare” events, information seminars, and one-on-one counseling that helps seniors and people with disabilities to choose wisely and, once they do, to navigate Medicare’s benefit and appeals processes to get the most out of their hard-earned Medicare benefits. SHIPs are also crucial in helping beneficiaries learn to navigate the new Medicare plan finder tool, explaining the new Medicare supplemental benefits and changes in consumer protections such as special enrollment periods.

If the investment in SHIP had kept pace with the growth in the older adult population and inflation over the past decade, it would be over \$70 million. A funding level of at least \$70 million—less than a dollar for every person enrolled in Medicare—is crucial for allowing over

2,000 local sites and nearly 16,000 SHIP staff and volunteer counselors continue to provide needed services to current beneficiaries.

Thank you for considering our request as you continue work on the FY 2021 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator

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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

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Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

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Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator

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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

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Tina Smith  
United States Senator

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Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

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John Tester  
United States Senator

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Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator