

United States Senate

June 11, 2021

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

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

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As you work on the fiscal year (FY) 2022 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, we ask that you provide adequate funding for the Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). We thank you for your leadership and your efforts in securing modest but much-needed increases for the program in FY 2020. 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 \$79.5 million in the FY 2022 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 were 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 \$79.5 million. A funding level of at least \$52.1 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 2022 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,




Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator




Tina Smith
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



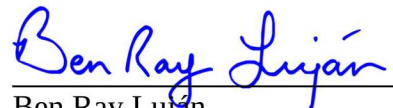
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



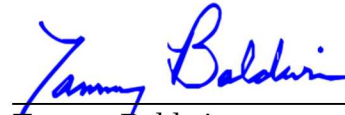
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



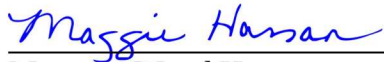
Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



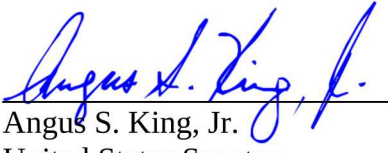
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Angus S. King, Jr. in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator