

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 11, 2019

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) 2020 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, we urge you to include at least \$70 million for the Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). This funding will allow SHIPs to continue their role as a source of independent advice for seniors, people with disabilities, and their families to choose Medicare plans that work best for them. 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 ability to meet ongoing needs.¹

SHIPs operate in every state, territory, and the District of Columbia with over 3,000 local offices.² They provide enrollment clinics, “Welcome to Medicare” events, information seminars, and one-on-one counseling that helps seniors and people with disabilities get the most out of their Medicare benefits. As the number of new Medicare eligible individuals continues to grow, so will the demand and the complexity of the system.³ SHIPs also provide assistance to individuals who need it the most, such as beneficiaries with reduced cognitive ability – a number that is expected to grow as the Medicare population ages. The personalized counseling that SHIPs provide cannot be replicated by reading information online or in print, as evidenced by the number of referrals to SHIP counselors from federal agencies like CMS which oversees Medicare.

SHIPs provide older Americans, people with disabilities, and their families with unbiased, cost-free, and personalized advice to help them navigate Medicare enrollment and obtain benefits. People on Medicare can choose among plan options each year that may look similar but whose differences could have significant impacts on cost-sharing and network access. For example, if beneficiaries chose the least expensive Part D plan in their region, they could save an average of \$368 per year.⁴ However, most beneficiaries are not well-informed, as illustrated by the number of calls, letters, or emails to Senate offices from constituents about Part D plans, reporting fraud, or getting financial help. Without the independent counseling and assistance that SHIPs provide,

¹ Cohn, D’Vera and Paul Taylor, Pew Research Center. “Baby Boomers Retire,” December 2010. (last visited April 4, 2019): <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2010/12/29/baby-boomers-retire/>.

² The Administration for Community Living, State Health Insurance Assistance Program, <https://acl.gov/programs/connecting-people-services/state-health-insurance-assistance-program-ship>

³ National Council on Aging, SHIPs Services Infographic, <https://www.ncoa.org/resources/ships-services-infographic/>

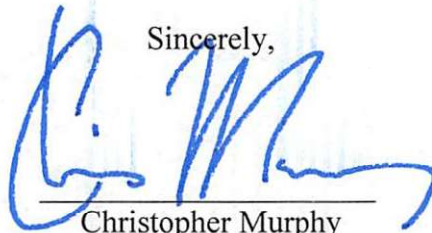
⁴ National Council on Aging, Funding for Medicare State Health Insurance Assistance Programs <https://www.ncoa.org/wp-content/uploads/1B17-SHIP-FY18-Funding-July.pdf>

seniors and people with disabilities may make choices that leave them with high out-of-pocket costs and limited access.

We ask that you protect this critical program by providing at least \$70 million for the SHIP program. This funding will help support all the Americans turning 65 and qualifying for Medicare every day.

Thank you for considering our request as you continue work on the FY2020 appropriations bill.

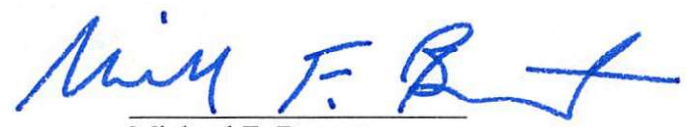
Sincerely,




Christopher Murphy
United States Senator



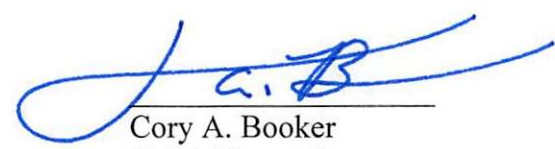
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



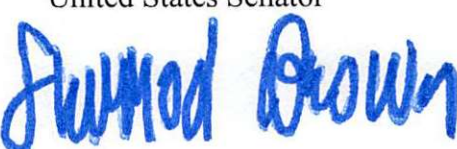
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



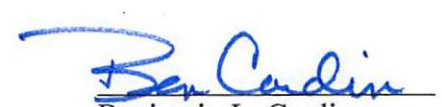
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



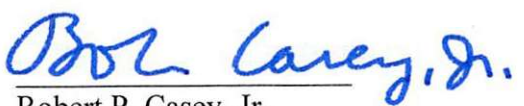
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



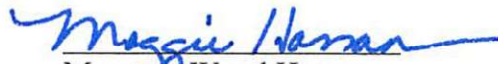
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



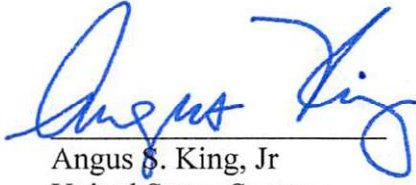
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



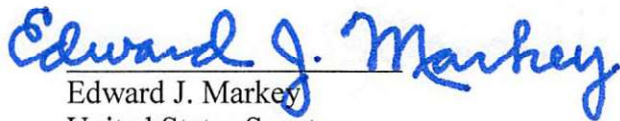
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



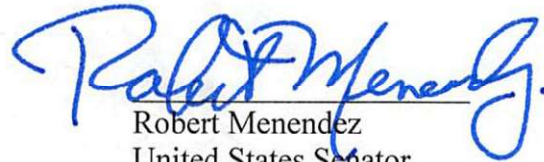
Angus S. King, Jr
United States Senator



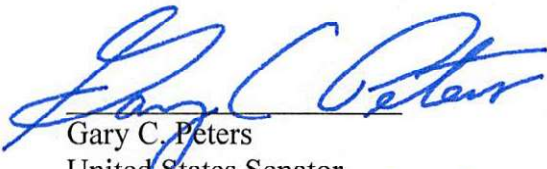
Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



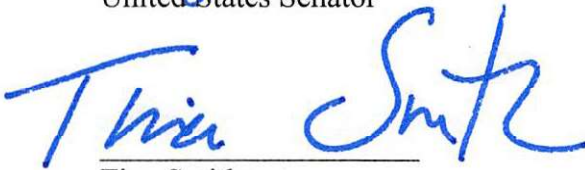
Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



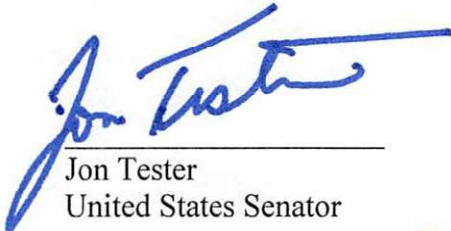
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator