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Consumers Union ☞ Empire Justice Center ☞ Make the Road New York ☞ Medicare Rights Center
Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign ☞ New Yorkers for Accessible Health Coverage ☞
New York Immigration Coalition ☞ Project CHARGE
Public Policy and Education Fund of New York/Citizen Action of New York
Raising Women's Voices-New York ☞ Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
Small Business Majority

HEALTH CARE FOR ALL NEW YORK STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION

FY2017 Labor, HHS & Education Appropriations Bill
Senate Appropriations Committee

JUNE 2016

HCFANY is a statewide coalition of over 170 organizations dedicated to achieving quality, affordable health coverage for all New Yorkers. We strive to bring consumer voices to the policy conversation, ensuring that the concerns of real New Yorkers are heard and reflected. HCFANY strongly opposes the provisions in the Senate Appropriations Committee FY 2017 bill that seek to eliminate funding to State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs). We strongly urge the House Appropriations Committee to increase SHIP funding or, at a minimum, provide level funding to the program.

The mission of the SHIPs is to empower, educate, and assist Medicare-eligible individuals, their families, and caregivers through objective outreach, counseling, and training, to make informed Medicare-related health insurance decisions that optimize access to care and benefits. In 2015, over 7 million people with Medicare received help from SHIPs. Since 1992, counseling services have been provided via telephone, one-on-one in-person sessions, interactive presentation events, health fairs, exhibits, and enrollment events. Individualized assistance provided by SHIPs almost tripled over the past 10 years.

SHIPs are a particularly critical resource for low-income older adults and people with disabilities enrolled in Medicare. SHIPs provided assistance to nearly 1.3 million individuals with incomes below 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (amounting to less than \$18,000 in annual income for a single household) in 2015. SHIPs are pivotal to helping people with Medicare maximize their income and resources, such as by assisting with enrollment in low-income programs and by supporting individuals in selecting the Part D prescription drug plan or Medicare Advantage plan best suited to their health and financial needs. For example, New York's SHIP program saved beneficiaries over \$100 million in 2015.

Health Care For All New York
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SHIPs receive funding under the Administration for Community Living (ACL) for 54 grantees (all states, Puerto Rico, Guam, DC, and the US Virgin Islands), overseeing a network of more than 3,300 local SHIPs and over 14,500 counselors, 57 percent of whom are highly trained volunteers who donate almost 2 million hours of assistance. On average, SHIP counselors spend 50 minutes with each client, and over 500,000 SHIP contacts in 2015 lasted more than one hour. About one-third of all partner referrals to SHIPs originate from Medicare Advantage and Part D prescription drug plans, local and state agencies, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Social Security Administration, and members of Congress and their staff.¹

The Senate Appropriations Committee FY 2017 bill seeks to eliminate funding for this critical program. According to the report language accompanying the bill: *Due to budget constraints, the Committee recommendation does not include funding for the State Health Insurance Assistance Program. The Committee expects ACL, in coordination with CMS and States, to continue to provide accurate and understandable health insurance information to Medicare beneficiaries and their families through existing HHS programs that support these activities.*² However, SHIPs offer increasingly critical services that cannot be supplied by 1-800 MEDICARE, on-line or written materials, or other outreach activities.

HCFANY opposes the provisions in the Senate Appropriations Committee FY 2017 bill that eliminate funding for SHIPs. We strongly urge the House Appropriations Committee to increase SHIP funding or, at a minimum, provide level funding to the program. SHIP counseling encompasses a broad ranges of areas, including coverage options, fraud and abuse issues, billing problems, appeal rights, and enrollment in low-income protection programs. SHIPs are an integral part of the health services network for Medicare beneficiaries, and these programs should receive the full support of Congress.

¹ For much of the data cited throughout, see: National Council on Aging (NCOA), “Issue Brief: Funding for State Health Insurance Assistance Programs” (2016), available at: <https://www.ncoa.org/resources/ship-funding-issue-brief-2016/>.

² See: <http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/download/fy2017-labor-health-and-human-services-and-education-bill-report-114-274> (pg. 148)