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MEDICARE RIGHTS CENTER

TESTIMONY

**ON THE HEALTH/MEDICAID BUDGET OF THE
2020-2021 NEW YORK STATE EXECUTIVE BUDGET**

Submitted to

The Senate Finance Committee

and

The Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2020

NEW YORK, NY

SUBMITTED BY:

FRED RICCARDI, PRESIDENT

Introduction

The Medicare Rights Center is a national, nonprofit consumer service organization—based in New York—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. Each year, Medicare Rights provides services and resources to over three million people with Medicare, family caregivers, and professionals as they navigate their health insurance, appeal coverage denials, and try to determine which coverage best suits their health needs. We develop education and public policy initiatives and work with our State and Federal partners to improve the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

We are also members of the statewide Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program (MCCAP) and the Community Health Advocates (CHA) networks. Our organization provides technical assistance and support to New York’s Health Insurance Information Assistance Program (HIICAP) and local CHA community-based organizations across New York State. In addition, Medicare Rights is a specialist agency of the Independent Consumer Advocacy Network (ICAN), which provides consumer assistance to people with long-term care needs who are enrolled in Medicaid managed care plans and the Community Health Access to Mental Health and Addiction Services Project (CHAMP), which provides assistance with access to behavioral health services.

Medicare Rights would like to thank the chairs and members of the respective committees for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Health/Medicaid Budget of the 2020-2021 New York State Executive Budget. Medicare Rights also facilitates the Coalition to Protect the Rights of New York’s Dually Eligible, a diverse group of over 50 consumer-based interests, agencies, and perspectives working to shape the managed care programs that coordinate care for older and disabled New Yorkers who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid.

We would like to share with the committees some additional comments regarding the following proposals in the Governor’s Budget: funding for the MCCAP; funding for CHA; and the creation of the Medicaid Redesign Team II.

Medicare Rights supports funding for the Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program, the state’s community-based consumer assistance program for people with Medicare.

We would like to thank Governor Cuomo for including level funding for the Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program (MCCAP) in his 2020-2021 budget. MCCAP is a statewide program that provides essential assistance to low-income seniors and people

with disabilities in accessing health services and reducing their Medicare costs. Medicare Rights has been a member of the MCCAP network of community-based organizations since the program's inception. Along with the other members of the MCCAP, Medicare Rights collaborates with the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) to take referrals of complicated cases and resolve complex Medicare issues.

Medicare Rights requests that the Legislature increase funding for MCCAP in 2020-2021 to the amount of \$2.767 million, an increase of \$1 million. We are pleased that the Governor's 2020-2021 Executive Budget includes funding for MCCAP at last year's level. However, several programs—New York State of Health (NYSoH), Managed Long-Term Care (MLTC), and Dual Eligible Special Needs Plans (D-SNPs)—have added to the complexity of the healthcare landscape for people with Medicare and those dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid. Thousands of New York residents will need MCCAP agencies to continue serving as trusted on-the-ground resources explaining how such changes affect their Medicare prescription drug and health coverage, and access to healthcare providers.

As a greater number of residents become Medicare eligible, MCCAP services are needed more than ever to help people enroll into valuable, cost-saving benefits such as the Medicare Savings Program (MSP) and Extra Help. Enrollment for New York Medicare beneficiaries in the MSP is far under the national average. By providing \$1 million in additional MCCAP funding, a new initiative could be started that is dedicated to reaching 25,000 more people with Medicare to educate them about the MSP and helping a minimum of 2,000 low-income New Yorkers enroll in MSP and Extra Help benefits. For an investment of \$1 million, the state could save elderly and disabled New Yorkers, many of whom live in poverty and on fixed incomes, over \$10 million in out-of-pocket expenses each year.

Medicare Rights supports funding for Community Health Advocates, New York State's statewide health care consumer assistance program.

Medicare Rights applauds the Cuomo Administration for including \$2.5 million for the Community Health Advocates (CHA) program, which supports a statewide network of community-based organizations and small business serving groups. CHA is seeking a matching \$2.5 million from the New York State Legislature to increase its capacity to serve more consumers with commercial insurance and Medicaid managed care. **Medicare Rights requests that the Legislature support the Administration's \$2.5 million appropriation and provide an additional \$2.5 million appropriation, or \$5 million in total, to fund CHA.**

Community Service Society of New York administers the CHA program in partnership with three specialist agencies: the Medicare Rights Center, Empire Justice Center, and

The Legal Aid Society. Together, these agencies have developed a strong, statewide learning community of service providers at community and business-serving groups by providing training and technical assistance and handling complex cases and appeals. CHA operates a central, toll-free helpline and provides local services through community-based organizations and small business-serving groups, and the CHA network serves every county in New York State.

Medicare Rights supports funding for Community Health Access to Mental Health and Addiction Services Project (CHAMP).

Launched in October 2018, CHAMP is a joint effort of the Office of Addiction Supports and Services and the Office of Mental Health in partnership with the Community Service Society; three specialist agencies: Legal Action Center, New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, and Medicare Rights Center; and five community-based organizations (CBOs).

Medicare Rights applauds Governor Cuomo for including \$1.5 million and the budget parity proposal. **We ask that the Legislature add \$1.5 million for a total of \$3 million in funding for CHAMP.** More funding for CHAMP will increase its geographic reach and allow for the hiring of additional counselors.

Medicare Rights is concerned about the Medicaid Redesign Team process, especially the level of meaningful consumer and community input.

As Governor Cuomo is calling for a reconvening of the Medicaid Redesign Team (MRT), **Medicare Rights asks that community-based organizations and consumers be invited to sit on and work with MRT II.** It is vital to include a variety of perspectives, especially those of Medicaid recipients and their advocates, in order to ensure the MRT meets the Governor's goal of changing Medicaid without hurting those using the Medicaid program. Without input from these key stakeholders, the MRT II initiative risks harming vulnerable New Yorkers who need Medicaid to stay healthy, independent, and financially independent. This is particularly true, given the short April 1 deadline for the initiative.

Medicare Rights supports the testimony presented to the committees by our partners the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) and the Legal Aid Society (LAS), which provide an overview of this proposal.