

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 29, 2016

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for your hard work in crafting the fiscal year 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. We appreciate your efforts to balance a number of important priorities and understand the inherent difficulties that are involved in this effort, particularly in light of current constraints on the federal budget. We are writing to highlight the valuable work of the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), and to respectfully request that funding for this important program be retained as work continues to complete action on a final FY 2017 funding bill. While the House Appropriations Committee has proposed level funding of \$52 million for SHIP in its bill, we are concerned that the Senate Committee-passed bill would eliminate funding for this program.

The process of signing up for Medicare can be complex and time consuming given the numerous decisions that must be made regarding Medicare Part D, Medicare Advantage, and other programs and benefits that supplement Medicare. SHIP is a critical tool that provides Medicare beneficiaries with local, one-on-one counseling and assistance to help them navigate the program. Paid and volunteer counselors are trained to provide information about Medicare and other health insurance issues and to help beneficiaries find, compare, and enroll in the coverage that is best suited for their needs.

The personalized nature of SHIP services exceeds what is offered through other federal programs like 1-800-MEDICARE and Medicare.gov. It can be of particular value for beneficiaries who may require more support when comparing and enrolling in coverage, including seniors with cognitive illness or other serious conditions and individuals with disabilities. As the number of Medicare beneficiaries continues to grow with the retirement of the baby boomers, it is even more important that we continue to make these services available to assist beneficiaries in understanding their options.

We appreciate your attention to this critical issue and look forward to working with you to continue support for the SHIP program.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator