

SUSAN M. COLLINS
MAINE

413 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904
(202) 224-2523
(202) 224-2693 (FAX)

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

September 1, 2017

COMMITTEES:
SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON AGING,
CHAIRMAN
APPROPRIATIONS
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
SELECT COMMITTEE
ON INTELLIGENCE

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 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for fiscal year (FY) 2018. I 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. I am writing to highlight the valuable work of the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), and to request that funding for this program be continued in FY 2018. Unfortunately, the administration's budget proposal requests deep cuts to this important 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. During open enrollment last year, SHIP staff and volunteer counselors in Maine helped 2,974 Mainers save nearly \$5 million, or an average of about \$2,000 per person.

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.

I 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