

Senator Maurice E. Washington
Legislative Committee on Health Care

Statement of:

Marilyn Wills, Director

State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)

Medicare Counseling Program for Nevada

- SHIP is a statewide Medicare counseling and assistance program, funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS).
- SHIP provides no direct medical or pharmacy assistance to residents of Nevada. We are funded (minimally) to provide *information on Medicare benefits and assistance to beneficiaries who have questions or complaints.*
- There are 303,000 Medicare beneficiaries in Nevada (43 million nationwide). Since 1997, SHIP has been annually funded for 2.5 staff statewide, and has relied on nearly 100 volunteers who are trained in Medicare.
- Funding temporarily increased as a result of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, which includes the Part D prescription drug benefit. SHIP currently has nine staff and about 70 temporary volunteers, trained specifically on Part D, to facilitate education and enrollment of beneficiaries into the prescription benefit, if appropriate.
- SHIP provides counseling and assistance through a temporary “mini-call center” in Las Vegas, *and* with the help of volunteers who provide face-to-face counseling at over 40 senior center, library, city and county sites throughout the state. The volume of personal assistance increased in recent months from an average of 300-500 calls/counseling visits per month to an average of over 1500/mo in the past three months.
- To date, according to CMS, 105,000 Nevada *Medicare* beneficiaries remain *without* prescription drug coverage. (Open enrollment ends May 15, 2006).
- Many of the 105,000 are potentially eligible for the Low Income Assistance Program, which is an extra help component of Part D. Over 140,000 Nevada individuals were identified by Social Security Administration (SSA) records as being potentially eligible for this assistance, with Clark County having the highest potentially eligible (90,000). Income levels are \$19,245 for a married couple and \$14,355 for a single person. There is an asset test in addition to income requirements. *These are the people we want most to reach between now and May 15; because they would be able to access their prescriptions at greatly reduced out of pocket costs.*
- For those not eligible for the “Extra Help” from the Federal government, the next option for assistance in paying for medications would be the Senior Rx program, funded by Nevada tobacco settlement funds. You will hear about that program during this testimony.

EXHIBIT F Health Care

Document consists of 2 pages

☒ Entire document provided.

☐ Due to size limitations, pages _____ provided.

A copy of the complete document is available through the Research Library

(775/684-6827 or e-mail library@lcb.state.nv.us).

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- Because of the complexity of the Part D program design, many Medicare beneficiaries have had difficulty enrolling into a prescription drug plan.
- There have been significant implementation issues, particularly for the Medicaid/Medicare beneficiaries, whose coverage moved from the Medicaid program to Medicare Part D. CMS, Medicaid, SHIP and many other partners are working to resolve these issues and assure that all beneficiaries eligible for this new drug benefit have been provided with the necessary information and assistance.