



June 17, 2016

Dear Senator:

It is with great apprehension that The Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut (AOASCC) awaits a decision on the proposed elimination of the SHIP program. As you are aware, the program in CT is entitled CHOICES. In the south central region of CT the AOASCC has served 111,200 older adults and people with disabilities who have questions, problems and concerns about their Medicare and/or Medicaid coverage through the CHOICES program. There appears to be a misconception that resources such as Social Security, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid, 211, and Municipal Agents can assist consumers with their Medicare problems. In fact, each of these resources constitute the largest portion of our referral sources. These agencies and program rely on CHOICES to solve the complex problems. CHOICES is not a scripted, robotic service. It is a place where Medicare and Medicaid recipients can receive one-on-one assistance resolving difficult issues and making complicated coverage decisions.

The roll-out of Medicare resulted in a four-fold increase in the calls we received from consumers and although special funding to assist callers with those problems ended long ago, the number of people needing assistance reviewing their unique medication needs and weighing their coverage options hasn't decreased.

Making the "right" choices regarding Medicare is an important and potentially costly choice if the "wrong" decision is made. Consumers need a source of accurate, impartial information to make informed decisions. CHOICES provides this service, but it also does so much more. When a consumer is hospitalized and informed with little or no notice of discharge, CHOICES helps that consumer know his/her rights and appeals the decision. When a consumer gets an ambulance bill for a middle of the night trip to the emergency room and coverage has been unfairly denied, CHOICES helps the consumer resolve the bill. When a medical provider incorrectly codes a service and coverage is denied, CHOICES helps untangle the bureaucratic snafu and gets the bill paid. When the Department of Health makes a commitment to reduce flu -related hospitalizations and death, CHOICES conducts region-wide forums to inform beneficiaries about the availability of Medicare preventive benefits to encourage widespread flu vaccination. Lastly, when a person about to turn 65 is faced with becoming a Medicare beneficiary, CHOICES provides small group classes where they can get their individual questions about Medicare benefits answered.

Please do all you can to save the SHIP program.

Ted Surh
President & CEO