

**AARP Massachusetts, Mass Association of Older Americans,
Mass Councils on Aging, Mass Home Care, Mass Senior Action Council**

December 5, 2011

Secretary Ann Hartstein
Executive Office of Elder Affairs
1 Ashburton Place, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02108

On December 1st, contractors for the SHINE (Serving the Health Information Needs of Elders) were informed by EOEA that funding for this program will be curtailed.

The SHINE Program is a state health insurance assistance program that provides free health insurance information, counseling and assistance to Massachusetts residents with Medicare and their caregivers. This includes the elderly — as well as individuals with disabilities. The program is administered by EOEA in partnership with Aging Services Access Points, Councils on Aging, and other community agencies. The program is entirely funded by the federal CMS (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services) — but most of the frontline counseling is provided by trained volunteers, whose in-kind financial contribution of time leverages a substantial added value at no cost to the Commonwealth.

EOEA indicated last week that it “does not anticipate any meaningful supplementation to the Basic SHINE grant.” Federal funds that were provided under the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) and the Affordable Care Act, were “one-time, non-recurring” funds from the federal government, and are due to be exhausted by April of 2012. The loss of federal Low Income Subsidy (LIS) grants, and MIPPA funds, could reduce support for SHINE by as much as 50%.

We were informed that the SHINE program in 2013 will have to operate primarily on the basic CMS federal SHIP (State Health Insurance & Counseling Program) grant (which was around \$868,000 in FY 12), with “no assumption of additional supplemental funds.” Congress has not finished its work on the SHIP budget, so we cannot know with certainty yet what the final basic grant will look like. But clearly this extremely valuable service is in financial distress.

In each of the last 5 years, SHINE counselors have assisted 50,000-60,000 Medicare beneficiaries with their health insurance questions. 66% of all SHINE counseling is done face-to-face and 75% of all counseling sessions last from 30 minutes to longer than an hour. SHINE staff conduct about 1,500 presentations each year, serving an average of 24,000 beneficiaries. In 2011 there are about 550 counselors, about 66% are volunteers.

CMS requires that every Medicare insurance plan in Massachusetts today include the phone number for the SHINE program on its marketing material — because this service is the only objective source of health insurance counseling for seniors in the Commonwealth. CMS mandates that SHIP programs serve at least 3% of the Medicare population. Our Massachusetts program serves 6%, and the increasing demand for this vital service suggests that we could easily serve 12% of the Medicare population and not reach the full demand for health insurance counseling.

Our request at this time is as follows:

- 1) that EOEI do what it can to ensure SHINE funding for the final three months of FY 2012
- 2) that EOEI work with us to support a funding line item in the FY 2013 Governor's budget in the amount of \$1,455,000 to allow the program to meet the goal of serving 9% of the Medicare population.
- 3) that we begin exploring the idea of a surcharge on all Medicare insurance products sold in Massachusetts that would be dedicated to the provision of health insurance counseling programs under the SHINE initiative.

We thank you for your past support for this very popular and needed service, and we hope that working together we can overcome the present funding challenges.

Yours,



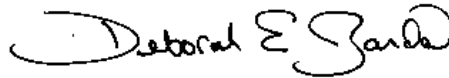
Al Norman
Mass Home Care



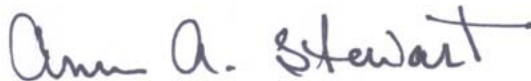
David Stevens
Mass Councils on Aging



Chet Jakubiak
Mass Association of Older Americans



Deb Banda
AARP Massachusetts



Ann Stewart
Mass Senior Action Council