



Medicare Rights Center

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January 5, 2007

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Medicare Rights Center

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The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, United States House of Representatives
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madame Speaker:

Over the past year, the Medicare Rights Center, the largest independent source of health care information and assistance in the United States for people with Medicare, has tried to help countless older adults and people with disabilities struggling to afford their medicines under the Medicare Part D prescription drug program. For too many, there is little we can do.

Burdened with illnesses that require expensive medications to treat, they face high copayments and, when they hit the gap, or “doughnut hole,” in the Part D benefit, the full cost of the drugs they need to stay alive and healthy. After a lifetime of hard work, they have modest incomes and modest savings, but fail to qualify for the Extra Help targeted at the most impoverished people with Medicare.

The insurance companies offering Part D have been unable to provide affordable drug prices to people with Medicare. As study after study has shown, the retail prices available under these plans are often at least twice the prices the Department of Veterans Affairs has been able to negotiate or that our neighbors in Canada pay. When drug manufacturers hike their prices, Part D plans pass on the increases dollar for dollar.

Legislation requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate lower Part D drug prices is sorely needed. We welcome the introduction of HR. 4 and urge the Congress to pass it on a bipartisan basis. If this bill becomes law and the Bush Administration negotiates vigorously with the pharmaceutical industry, lower prescription drug prices will help millions of people with Medicare avoid the Part D doughnut hole. It will ease the financial burden of expensive medicines that millions of older adults and people with disabilities need to stay alive.

HR. 4 is an important step toward making Part D work for people with Medicare and American taxpayers. We look forward to working with all members of the 110th Congress to enact other crucial improvements, including providing the option of receiving drug coverage directly from Medicare.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Hayes
President
Medicare Rights Center

cc: The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives