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SB 219 Senior Prescription Drug Assistance Program – Sunset Extension
Senate Finance Committee
FAVORABLE
January 31, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Beidle and members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Jim Gutman, resident of Columbia, and lead health care advocacy volunteer for AARP-Maryland. I'm also a member of the Stakeholder Council of the Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board representing the public. I am testifying on behalf of AARP Maryland and its approximately 900,000 members in favor of SB 219.

The Maryland Senior Prescription Drug Assistance Program (SPDAP), throughout its more than 20-year history, has been an indispensable source of needed assistance for Maryland-resident seniors in coping with very high and continually increasing costs of prescription drugs. The premiums for Medicare Prescription Drug Plans (PDPs) have risen sharply to reflect these cost hikes, and the assistance SPDAP provides in reducing and, in some cases, eliminating monthly premiums for these PDPs has made a huge difference.

SPDAP should not be allowed to "sunset" on Dec. 31 but instead, as the Department of Health suggests and is contained in this bill, deserves to have its role and subsidies continued through Dec. 31, 2030.

I have seen firsthand the good that SPDAP does in my role as a volunteer PDP counselor, first in Baltimore County and now in Howard County, for the State Health Insurance Assistance Program in Maryland each annual open-enrollment season since 2016.

Specifically, the subsidies in SPDAP often have made the difference in the many Maryland low-income Medicare beneficiaries who don't qualify for the federal Extra Help subsidy. Instead of choosing the wrong PDP program for themselves because they feel they can afford only the lowest-premium plans, these beneficiaries because of SPDAP more often choose the right plans by evaluating both coverage and cost. This in turn improves the chances that these older Marylanders, and especially those in the greatest financial stress, will get the prescriptions they need when they need them.

For those and numerous other reasons, AARP Maryland requests that the Senate Finance Committee give a favorable report to SB 219. For questions or more information, please feel free to contact Tammy Bresnahan, Senior State Director of Advocacy at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.



