



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RAHALL BLASTS SOC. SECURITY FOR OVERCHARGING LOW-INCOME SENIORS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today blasted the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for overcharging West Virginia's low-income seniors almost \$30 a month for Medicare insurance. Rahall charged that the agency is thwarting "Congressional intent" by not making available information that would have aided low-income Medicare beneficiaries under the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) program.

"The program was set up to aid our poorest of Medicare recipients, to help them afford the sky-rocketing costs of health care in America today," said Rahall. "It has come to my attention that by failing to notify eligible [recipients] of the existence of this program, only 50 percent of those entitled are actually receiving it," said Rahall. "To a low-income senior, this amounts to an extra \$358.80 a year."

Rahall urged HHS to correct this matter and suggested they set-up hotlines and direct mailings to contact eligible recipients. Also, Rahall called on HHS to reimburse those who had already had funds deducted from their social security checks.

The QMB program would have allowed the poorest of Medicare beneficiaries to waive the \$29.90 fee that is taken from their paychecks each month, as well as certain physician and hospital costs for which they are not liable.

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Dr. Louis W. Sullivan
Secretary
Dept. Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

I am taking this opportunity to request your immediate attention to an issue recently raised in a report released by the Families USA Foundation. It is abhorrent that the Department of Health and Human Services has thwarted Congressional intent in the implementation of the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) program.

It has come to my attention that by failing to notify eligible, low income Medicare beneficiaries of the existence of the Medicare buy-in only half of those entitled to this benefit are actually receiving it. To a low income senior this amounts to a unnecessary financial burden of \$358.80 a year as well as physician and hospital costs for which they are not liable. For an individual below or near the poverty line, this represents an expenditure of funds that they can ill afford.

The Department should immediately implement an information dissemination program targeted at those Medicare recipients that qualify for the QMB program. Additionally, the Department should repay the money that those individuals have unfairly had deducted from their Social Security checks.

I again urge your immediate attention in this matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon on the Department's plans to correct this unfair matter.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,

NICK J. RAHALL, II
Member of Congress

NJR/dm