

Murphy, Courtney Unveil Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage Fix

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HARTFORD – Today, Congressmen Joe Courtney (CT-2) and Chris Murphy (CT-5) announced that they will introduce legislation in Congress to improve and expand the Medicare Part D prescription drug program. Murphy and Courtney have long been advocates for fixing certain harmful provisions in the prescription drug program to give Connecticut's seniors a program with real savings and without penalties.

Congressman Courtney and Murphy were joined by Judith Stein, Executive Director of the Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc. to discuss the importance of this legislation to Connecticut's senior citizens and Medicare Part D participants.

"Part of the reason Congressman Courtney and I were sent to Washington was that people here were fed up with a Congress that was enacting policies that were beneficial only to a privileged few. The Medicare Part D program was written by and for the drug companies. It's long past time to rewrite this program so that it benefits seniors and taxpayers, not pharmaceutical company executives," said Murphy.

"Connecticut's senior citizens and those throughout the nation deserve a prescription drug benefit that penalizes less, and rewards more. Congressman Murphy and I were elected to Congress to improve the lives of the American people and I am confident that by fixing and improving the ill conceived Medicare Part D program we will be achieving that goal. Let's honor our senior citizens by making sure that they have the resources they need to enjoy the quality of life they deserve," stated Courtney.

Murphy and Courtney will introduce legislation to create a government administered Medicare prescription drug plan to compete with the dozens of other private plans offered in Connecticut and hundreds throughout the nation. In Connecticut, seniors can choose from a confusing array of 51 private plans for their prescription drug coverage. The new federal prescription drug program will, like other Medicare coverage, be available nationwide at a uniform price. The government will be able to negotiate for better drug prices and use those savings to eliminate the black out period for sign up, late enrollment fees, and offset the gap in coverage. And even more money could be saved as Medicare could administer its program with as low as a 2.1% overhead cost, while the overhead of private insurers' programs often runs as high as 16.7%.

Congressmen Courtney and Murphy also seek to remove harmful provisions created by the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 that have wrongly penalized Connecticut's senior citizens and other Medicare Part D participants.

The Connecticut lawmakers seek to address the "Doughnut Hole" gap in coverage, eliminate the asset test for Low Income Subsidy, remove the "lock-in" period by enacting a permanent open enrollment period, end the policy of lifetime late enrollment penalties, and provide in-person hearings for those seeking to appeal a Medicare decision.

"The legislation that Congressman Murphy and I are proposing recognizes the fact that many senior citizens live on low and fixed incomes, which is something that was obviously neglected when the program was crafted four years ago. Unlike the previous Congresses, this new majority will put an end to punishing those of meager means and stop penalizing those seniors who can least afford it. I am proud to work with Congressman Murphy to right these wrongs and hope that my colleagues in Congress will support this critical legislation," added Courtney.

"There is no reason that seniors should have to choose between 51 different plans – Medicare should be offering its own plan that includes all the features they need. And the private plans that are offered should be affordable, easy to navigate, and recognize that a patient's health needs change without warning," said Murphy.

"The Center for Medicare Advocacy is grateful to Congressmen Courtney and Murphy for introducing legislation that will make Medicare prescription drug coverage affordable, understandable, and uniformly available to older people and people with disabilities. These bills respond to the real needs of real people by allowing them to obtain this important coverage through the regular Medicare program and to make changes as their health needs change," said Judith Stein, Executive Director, Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.

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