Seniors Demand Action on Affordable Health Care, Access to Healthy Food and Fair Pay for Home Workers

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BOSTON, MA – The Massachusetts Senior Action Council (MSAC) joined with allies from six other elder advocacy organizations to lobby lawmakers on life-saving reforms seniors need — to protect their health, wellbeing and dignity as they age. MSAC is the only elder organization in Massachusetts that is run by its senior members.

MSAC’s top legislative priority is expanding access to the Medicare Savings Program. This measure would prevent seniors from losing coverage when they age out of subsidized Connector Care, but have too much income to qualify for subsidies through the federal Medicare Saving Program.

MSAC won a major victory when Governor Baker’s budget proposal included a provision to expand access to the federal Medicare Savings Program. This provision would help 40,000 seniors afford medicine and doctor’s visits.

“Despite working so hard for many years, it has not been easy since I retired,” said Sarah Blakeney, MSAC organizer. “I perform an incredible juggling act each month. 20% of my income goes to my [healthcare] premium alone. By the time I pay for my prescriptions, that’s over 30% of my income on routine care. The governor’s budget includes the first step towards closing the healthcare gap by expanding the Medicare Savings Program. This first step cuts my healthcare costs in half overnight, and will help 40,000 people just like me. I can’t begin to tell you what that means.”

The budget provision is a “first step” in the right direction, but MSAC is urging action on a bill (H.B.1199, S.B.699) that would create a 3-step staircase bill to increase access to affordable health care for more than 70,000 seniors.

Mattie Lacewell, MSAC organizer said that, “It’s atrocious that a person has to choose between medication and food. These are basic needs. Basic needs shouldn’t have to get the run-around.”

MSAC also joined with ally organizations to highlight other key legislative priorities. For instance:

Closing the SNAP Gap – many low-income seniors who do qualify for health care subsidies but don’t realize it, even though they are eligible. This could easily be resolved by automatically enrolling eligible seniors for SNAP benefits when they apply for the Medicare Savings Program.

Fair Pay for Home Care Workers – many elders rely on home care workers and they deserve to have a fair wage.

Many of the seniors’ legislative priorities have significant bipartisan support. Seniors are looking to House and Senate leadership to take up these items and ensure they get a vote this year.

“We will not stop until we see the senior healthcare gap is closed. We will not stop until every senior can afford food. We will not stop until housing and healthcare are a right. Because we know Massachusetts can do better,” said Kathy Paul, MSAC organizer.
The seniors were joined by a number of supportive legislators at to speak about these issues, including Chairwoman Patricia Jehlen and Chairwoman Ruth Balser from the Committee on Elder Affairs.

Other prominent senior organizations in attendance at Elder Lobby Day included AARP, the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI), Alzheimer’s Association, Massachusetts Council on Aging and Massachusetts Home Care.

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