



April 30, 2025

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Senior Agenda Coalition of RI (SACRI) an organization that advocates for policies and budget priorities to ensure our older population enjoys a good quality of life I strongly support **H5529** and urge you to as well.

I want to thank Representative Alzate and the bill's co-sponsors for once again introducing a bill to expand the Medicare Savings Programs (MSP) which will assist more lower-income persons on Medicare, but not on Medicaid, to access needed healthcare and increase their economic security. The Senior Agenda has advocated for several years to increase the income cap for the program as many states have done. In fact, R.I. is now an outlier when compared to our neighboring states of Connecticut and Massachusetts and several others.

Why is this important when persons have Medicare? Medicare is not free. It has Premiums (Part B Is \$185/mo.) and deductibles and co-payments that often result in persons neglecting medical care because they cannot afford a \$40 co-pay for a medical appointment or several hundred dollars for a procedure. Medicare has big gaps. It does not cover dental care, hearing aids and non-skilled long term care. Average out-of-pocket cost for a Medicare enrollee is \$6,600 (AARP.) Imagine the anxiety of being on a limited fixed income as many Medicare enrollees are and trying to deal with such costs along with your other expenses!

H5529 is modeled on a New York law approved by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS). It increases the income limit from 135% Federal Poverty Level (\$21,127) to 186% (\$29,109) and reduces it from three levels to two and removes the asset limit of \$9,660. These changes would make thousands of new R.I.ers eligible to have their Part B premiums covered by the federal government as those newly eligible would no longer have the \$185/mo. part B premium deducted from their Social Security check. In these times of rampant inflation this is money they can use to pay for essential needs such as food and housing. Also, under the bill those under 138% of the FPL (\$1,800) would now be eligible to have their deductibles and co-payments covered. This is important as we hear too many stories of persons forgoing care and treatments as they cannot afford the co-payments.

Another feature of the bill is that it would automatically enroll newly eligible persons in the federal "Extra Help" program that assists with prescription drug costs saving them even more money by eliminating any Part D deductibles or coverage gaps and capping drug costs.

We urge you to support this bill. SACRI and its partners have urged you to increase MSP eligibility for a number of years. Connecticut increased eligibility up to \$3,209/mo. and Massachusetts up to \$2,935 and both have eliminated the asset test. It is a **WIN** for thousands of lower-income persons in communities across the state. It will help them to access healthcare and put money in their pockets to pay for food, rent and other basic needs. It is a **WIN** for the State as well as dollars saved by new enrollees not having to pay for the Part B premiums will bolster our economy as they are used to pay for basic needs

Sincerely,
Carol Costa, Executive Director SACRI