

# State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations



## Department of Human Services Division of Elderly Affairs

Testimony Submitted by  
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U.S. Senate Committee on Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism  
field hearing on  
Protecting Medicare and Medicaid: Efforts to Prevent, Investigate, and Prosecute Health Care  
Fraud

East Providence, Rhode Island  
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### **Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Activities in Rhode Island**

Thank you, Senator Whitehouse, for this important opportunity to bring attention to the highly effective activities of the Senior Medicare Patrol, or SMP, in detecting Medicare fraud.

Several significant cases of suspected Medicare fraud have occurred in the last few years in Rhode Island. Between March, 2008 and December, 2010 a Warwick, RI ambulance company owner allegedly defrauded Medicare and Blue Cross Blue Shield of RI out of more than \$700,000 by soliciting beneficiaries to receive medically unnecessary ambulance transportation. In 2010 a Massachusetts-based dermatologist agreed to repay \$275,000 for Medicare payments for unnecessary pathology services. In April 2011, CVS Pharmacy paid the United States, Rhode Island and 9 other states a collective \$17.5 million to resolve allegations of overbilling Medicaid for prescription claims. And in January, 2012, a Woonsocket, RI woman pleaded guilty to committing Medicare fraud by obtaining Medicare numbers from seniors at senior centers, senior housing facilities, and assisted living facilities, and ordering numerous diabetic shoes and arthritis equipment at no cost to the seniors and without their knowledge. Medicare was charged more than \$70,000.

Rhode Island's 184,000 Medicare beneficiaries can play an active role in ensuring that the Medicare Trust Fund remains solvent, by working on the front lines to prevent the multi-billion dollar annual drain on the program nationwide attributable to fraud. The Senior Medicare Patrol – or SMP -- program keeps our RI Medicare beneficiaries alert to possible fraudulent activity, and, importantly, arms them with the knowledge and tools to combat it.

The Rhode Island Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA) DEA has administered the Senior Medicare Program since 2005, with funding from the U.S. Administration on Aging and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The SMP program marshals the efforts of senior volunteers to teach their peers how to fight Medicare fraud.

This year, pursuant to the Affordable Care Act, the federal government is ramping up its anti-fraud effort, offering grants to the states to beef up volunteer recruitment and to provide rigorous training to volunteers. Rhode Island was fortunate to receive a one-year grant to engage a volunteer recruiter and trainer, Louanne Marcello, who is in the audience today, along with DEA's SMP program manager, Aleatha Dickerson.

The RI Division of Elderly Affairs and our SMP partners have worked diligently over the past three years to publicize the SMP message. In the 2011 RI-SMP funding year, we conducted the following activities that may have resulted in decreased Medicare fraud, waste, or abuse:

- 8,016 Medicare/Medicaid error, fraud, waste, or abuse *simple inquiries* received;
- 4,223 people estimated to have been reached by community education events;
- 34 fraud, waste, or abuse *complex issues* pending further action; and
- 40 active volunteers recruited and trained in one year.

SMP volunteers are helping their peers get in the habit of carefully reviewing their Medicare Summary Notice each month, on the lookout for discrepancies such as charges for services, equipment or medications never prescribed or provided, charges for medical appointments that were never made with an unknown physician, or extraordinarily high bills. Other common Medicare scams include counterfeit prescription drugs, double-billing both Medicare and a private insurance company for the same service, billing for individual counseling when group counseling is used, and medical identity theft.

One-on-one counseling and general education sessions are available in Rhode Island at six SMP Program partner locations: THE POINT at United Way; Tri-Town Community Action Agency; South County Community Action Agency; the East Bay Community Action Program; the West Bay Community Action Program; and Child and Family Services of Newport County, Inc.. Volunteers help check paperwork such as Medicare notices and billing to identify errors and discrepancies.

The greatest ally of any scam artist is silence. SMP volunteers teach their peers that stopping Medicare fraud is as easy as 1-2-3: 1. **Protect** Your Medicare Number. 2. **Detect** Discrepancies On Your Medicare Summary Notice. 3. **Report** Your Concerns. Anyone who suspects they have been a victim of fraud or abuse can file a report with the RI SMP Program by calling 401-462-0931.

It *exciting* that Medicare beneficiaries are taking ownership of protecting the Medicare program from fraud. One of our newest volunteer recruits at Westbay CAP, 82-year-old Edna Fortin, a controller and accountant at Columbus Door, responded to an ad in December, saying, "I started thinking how much older people can give back to their community." Barbara Hackett, a retired project manager at AT&T and resident of East Greenwich, says of the Medicare beneficiaries she assists, "I want to make them feel empowered."

It is also *essential* that we harness the volunteer power of Medicare beneficiaries themselves to do this work. No one is better positioned to recognize fraud, or more invested in ensuring that Medicare dollars are there for *them*, not the scam artists.

Thank you again, Senator Whitehouse, for allowing me to showcase what an excellent investment the Senior Medicare Patrol is.