



For Immediate Release:
October 24, 2017

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INADEQUATE STATE FUNDING THREATENS THE CARE OF 12,000 NEW YORK SENIORS

WESTERN NY OPTIONS LIMITED FOR SENIORS RELYING ON STATE SSI SUPPORT FOR ASSISTED LIVING SERVICES

The state's failure to authorize an increase in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) rate has left approximately 12,000 low-income seniors statewide, unable to live on their own, with few residential options.

For years, New York's adult care facilities (ACFs), commonly known as adult homes, enriched housing programs, or assisted living residences, have been struggling to maintain their operations due to the state's low SSI reimbursement rate. These licensed adult care facilities (ACFs), provide critical services for the elderly, such as housing, food, assistance with their personal care needs, and medication monitoring. For low-income seniors and disabled individuals, SSI pays for all of these services. Without the ACF living options, the majority of seniors would prematurely end up in costly nursing homes or in local shelters.

"New York's assisted living industry for low-income seniors is in crisis," said Tammy McCool, administrator of the Women's Christian Association in Fredonia. "Over a decade ago there were a number of residences in the area that accepted SSI payment for services. However, that number has dwindled due to the state's inadequate SSI rate."

According to McCool, a substantial part of the residence's revenue comes from SSI payments provided by the federal government and the state. While the federal government has offered incremental increases, the state has ignored the issue. The current rate in New York is \$41 per day, which was set in 2007. The state's 2007 increase was the only increase in more than two decades.

"The rate is inadequate. We are simply unable to provide care and services 24-hours, seven-days per week for \$41 per day," said McCool. "With the minimum wage get to go up to \$10.40 as of January 1 and the cost of medical evaluations and certifications mandated by the state, the \$41 per day will only cover approximately three hours of care. And this does not include meals or structured activities."

"We really need to ask ourselves, 'Are we doing the best we can for our seniors?'" said McCool. "Often I learn of an older individual living alone at home who is receiving case management services for a few hours per day. This in itself can be very costly. For example, if an individual needs assistance three hours a day at \$20 per hour, you have already exceeded the cost of the SSI assisted living reimbursement rate. Spending more money, on less care. What's more, many times these individuals become isolated and in some instances, injuries – from falls or medication mismanagement – can occur. This is not good for anyone."

Currently there is a measure A.6715B/S.6732 (Brindisi/Serino) in the state Legislature to increase the SSI rate by a total of \$20 per day. The measure received overwhelming support in the state Assembly and Senate and will soon be transmitted to the Governor for consideration.

"We need additional quality, affordable long-term care options today more than ever," said Lisa Newcomb, executive director of the Empire State Association of Assisted Living (ESAAL). "Without an increase in SSI, more residence doors will close and seniors across New York will be forced prematurely into nursing homes, threatening their independence and exponentially raising costs for the state."

For more information, please visit ESAAL at <http://www.esaal.org> and follow on twitter @essalNYS .