



For Immediate Release

Contact: Rick Abbruzzese
(410) 814-4206

MARTIN O'MALLEY CALLS UPON GOVERNOR TO PROTECT MARYLAND SENIORS

O'Malley Urges Ehrlich to Follow Baltimore's Lead in Assisting Seniors

BALTIMORE, MD (January 12, 2006) - Today, Martin O'Malley called upon Governor Ehrlich to immediately establish a hotline and resource call-center for seniors and their pharmacists struggling to understand and enroll in Medicare Part D for prescription drug benefits.

Beginning on January 1, 2006 Medicare Part D – passed by Congress as part of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 – took effect in the United States, providing seniors and people with disabilities prescription drug benefits under Medicare.

Yet, problems with the transition to Medicare Part D have led to complaints nationwide by seniors who have missed the deadline to enroll in Medicare Part D due to lack of information, seniors being overcharged for their prescriptions, or being turned away altogether by pharmacists who fear they will not be reimbursed under the new program, causing at least four states - Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Vermont - to take action to make sure low-income seniors who depend on Medicare receive their prescriptions.

"Under Bob Ehrlich, we see our state government failing Maryland seniors in their struggle to get their medications," said Martin O'Malley. "I urge the Governor to follow Baltimore's lead and establish a statewide hotline and call-center that can respond immediately to the needs of all Maryland seniors and pharmacists struggling to deal with this new Medicare program."

In December, the City of Baltimore launched a major initiative to monitor the implementation of Medicare Part D and assist city residents in obtaining access to essential medications. The Baltimore Medicare Part D Surveillance & Response initiative is operated by the Baltimore City Health Department and the Commission on Aging and Retirement Education (CARE).

Under the program, pharmacists report to the Baltimore City Health Department any problems faced by city residents in the transition to Medicare Part D. Pharmacists can report these problems by fax, internet or phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Health Department then notifies CARE outreach workers who contact the patient by phone or by home visit within 72 hours to help resolve the insurance problem.

In a December 21, 2005 Baltimore Sun article - just 10 days before the transition to Medicare Part D took effect for thousands of Maryland resident - the State Department of Health stated that "an undetermined number of people in Maryland state programs haven't yet been confirmed as signed up for a Medicare plan, but the state expects more enrollment information later this week."

To date, no information regarding statewide enrollment has been released, or have any programs been developed statewide to assist seniors and pharmacists with enrollment in Medicare Part D.

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Friends of Martin O'Malley – 2400 Boston Street, Suite 203 – Baltimore, MD 21224 – 410-814-4206 – fax: 410-814-4219

Authority: Friends of Martin O'Malley, Martin F. Cadogan, Treasurer