



Congressman John Sarbanes

Working for Maryland's 3rd Congressional District

Dear Friend,

I am writing to draw your attention to a matter of great consequence for our seniors and their families. Many of you have been hearing about the ten-year budget proposal introduced by Republican Congressman Paul Ryan and recently passed by the House of Representatives. I voted against this bill and, given strong opposition in the Democratic Senate, it is unlikely to become law in its current form. However, it is important that you have a clear understanding of what the proposal contains because it represents a direct assault on the Medicare and Medicaid programs that is likely to continue.

Among my greatest concerns about this proposal is that it would significantly increase the out-of-pocket expenses of our seniors. The Ryan budget would do the following:

- ***Increase drug costs for Medicare beneficiaries.*** The plan would repeal the provision included in the Affordable Care Act that gradually closes the dreaded “donut hole” in the Medicare Part D prescription drug plan. It would also immediately eliminate a 50 percent discount on brand-name drugs that was just made available to seniors in the donut hole.
- ***Increase costs of preventive treatment for Medicare beneficiaries.*** Under the proposal, seniors would have to begin paying for key preventive services including annual wellness visits, mammograms, colonoscopies, and glaucoma screenings. Currently, these services are completely covered by Medicare, which makes fiscal sense because early intervention reduces costs over the long term.
- ***Reduce coverage for long-term care.*** The budget proposal would convert Medicaid into a block grant program to states and cut approximately \$771 billion from the program. This would mean less Medicaid benefits to cover the cost of nursing home care and other home and community-based supports that many seniors depend on.
- ***Dismantle Medicare for future generations.*** The ultimate goal of the budget proposal is to transform Medicare into a voucher program. Instead of providing guaranteed benefit coverage for the treatments seniors need, Medicare would issue a fixed-dollar voucher to seniors. If a senior required services whose costs exceeded the value of the voucher, he or she would be responsible for paying those additional costs. According to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, this plan would more than double seniors’ share of premiums and out-of-pocket spending. Even a phased-in voucher program as proposed would have an immediate effect on tens of millions of families by completely upending their plans for retirement security.

What I find most jarring is that, when it comes to finding budget savings and addressing the deficit, the Republicans are eager to slash Medicare benefits but would leave untouched the many tax breaks that go to America’s wealthiest individuals and corporations. I believe that is fundamentally unfair and inconsistent with our values as a nation.

I want to reassure you that my commitment to supporting our seniors is strong and that I will fight against any efforts to dismantle Medicare or increase health care costs for seniors. As the discussion on Medicare moves forward, I look forward to receiving your continued input.

Sincerely,

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

