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

MEASURE BEFORE THE GOVERNOR WOULD AID 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.

"With upstate New York's population graying, we need additional quality, affordable long-term care options for our seniors today more than ever," said Dan Wegman, owner of Hilton East Assisted Living Community in Hilton. "Unfortunately, the exact opposite is occurring in the Rochester region. A decade ago, there were a number of residences in the area accepting SSI payment for services. However, that number has dwindled due to the state's inadequate SSI rate."

According to Wegman, a substantial part of the adult care facility'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 only the second increase in more than two decades.

"Residences simply cannot provide care and services 24-hours, seven-days per week for \$41 per day," said Wegman. "If the state doesn't act, more residences will close, forcing more frail elderly living on fixed incomes to leave their home. What's even more concerning is that many may not receive the care they need."

"While the state SSI rate has remained frozen, per person costs for ACFs have skyrocketed," said Lisa Newcomb, executive director of the Empire State Association of Assisted Living (ESAAL). "Because of the financial losses, many of these homes have closed or face closure. Across New York, dozens of SSI facilities have closed over the last several years – forcing low-income seniors to search for other care options."

Tammy McCool, administrator of the Women's Christian Association in Fredonia said, "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) before the Governor for consideration. The measure increases the state's SSI reimbursement rate by a total of \$20 per day over a five-year period for individuals needing assisted living care in state licensed adult care facilities (ACFs). The Governor has until Dec. 18 to decide its fate.

"We receive weekly inquiries from families seeking residential placement," said Sharon Casler, director of Marketing & Sales for Bethany Village Senior Living in Horseheads. "There is an unprecedented demand for assisted living services in New York's Southern Tier, particularly for low-income seniors. Unfortunately, residents who we cannot admit may have to go prematurely into nursing homes, threatening their independence and exponentially raising costs for the state."

"Without an increase in SSI, more residence doors will close," said Newcomb. "It is clear the state cannot ignore this issue any longer, it must act. We must do better for our seniors."

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