

February 13, 2018

Senator Kamila Harris
112 Hart *Senate* Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
(via fax)

Dear Senator Harris,

I'm writing on behalf of our coalition to alert you to an issue that greatly concerns us. A 12-year-old program that has helped more than 75,000 seniors and individuals with disabilities move out of nursing homes is in jeopardy in Congress.

Enacted in 2005 with strong bipartisan support, Money Follows the Person (MFP) is one of the longest running and most successful Medicaid demonstrations. It helps states transition older adults and people with disabilities from nursing homes back to their communities. It also allows states to make it easier for people to access home and community-based services (HCBS).

California uses MFP, contracting with local entities – including our partner organizations here in Alameda County – to transition people from SNF to the community. MFP participants report significant and lasting improvements in quality of life after returning to the community. In addition, their overall Medicare and Medicaid expenditures decrease by 23%.

Unfortunately, MFP expired in October 2016, and states are running out of funding. Most are now scaling back their programs and reducing dedicated staff and resources. Last year was the first time that the number of new people served declined.

Sens. Portman (R-OH) and Cantwell (D-WA) have crafted new legislation (S. 2227) to extend the program for five years. The extension also would make minor improvements, including reducing the length of stay in an institution from 90 to 60 days, enhancing state accountability to ensure funds go toward home and community-based services, and improving sharing of best practices across states.

Extending the program will allow states to continue progress. Currently, HCBS accounts for 75% of spending in programs targeting people with developmental disabilities, but only 41% of spending for programs targeting older people, people with physical disabilities, and those with serious mental illness. In addition, over 50,000 nursing home residents say they want to talk with someone about leaving their facility, but they have not received a referral to a local agency that could help them, according to recent analyses

We encourage you to co-sponsor S. 2227. Extending Money Follows the Person is a common sense Medicaid reform. It improves the lives of older adults and people with disabilities while assisting states with moving away from funding nursing homes in favor of more cost-effective home and community-based services.

Senior Services Coalition
of Alameda County

Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County and our 40 member organizations are committed to improving the lives of low-income seniors in Alameda County, especially those whose complex health, cognitive and mobility challenges put them at risk.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions. I can best be reached by email at wendy@seniorservicescoalition.org or by phone at 510-332-4669.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendy Peterson".

Wendy Peterson
Director, Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County