

## COALITION MADE PROGRESS IN 2009

As is customary at year's end, it's a good time to review our progress in improving the quality of life for Rhode Island's seniors. Despite a state budget deficit, we preserved an important prescription drug subsidy program for seniors. The Governor's fiscal 2010 budget proposed elimination of the RI Pharmaceutical Assistance for the Elderly (RIPAE) program. RIPAE subsidizes the prescription costs for over 18,000 seniors enrolled in the Medicare Part D program who reach the "donut hole" of \$2700 in annual expenditures. The Senior Agenda Coalition, joined by AARP-RI, the Gray Panthers and the RI Senior Centers Directors, presented testimony and petitions that helped restore funding for RIPAE.

In addition to saving RIPAE, we helped enact legislation containing important safeguards and enhancements for seniors receiving home and community based services (HCBS) under the global Medicaid waiver. These provisions included:

- a) Confirmation of the 50/50 goal for "rebalancing" to achieve 50% state Medicaid long term care spending on HCBS for elders and disabled adults by 2013.
- b) "Grandfathering" the right of seniors living in nursing homes prior to July 15, 2009, to return to nursing home care if their community placements fail.
- c) Prohibition of waiting lists for HCBS services for those transitioning out of nursing homes.
- d) Provision of a new long term care options counseling program for seniors and their families to enable them to make informed choices about long term care.
- e) Development by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) of a community education and outreach program about HCBS.
- f) Reversal of a proposed increase in client share for adult day services for co-pay clients.

Maureen Maigret, the Senior Agenda's consultant on long term care, played a vital role in achieving these legislative victories. She helped draft some of the legislative language and educated legislators about the need for these provisions. We recognized the General Assembly's leadership and attention to seniors' needs by an award to House Finance Chair Steven Costantino at our Annual Conference.

The year's most encouraging development for seniors was that DHS began to implement "rebalancing" long term care. By the end of November, 2009 eighty-one seniors had been voluntarily transitioned from nursing home care to HCBS settings. This happened with very few problems, thanks to the stellar work of the Alliance for Better Long Term Care that managed this transitioning under a DHS contract. Simultaneously DHS diverted one hundred and forty-nine seniors into HCBS instead of nursing homes under the global Medicaid waiver. These results confirmed our belief that, if given the opportunity and services, many more seniors can "age in the community" than are doing so today.

Challenges to continued progress on long term care lie ahead. Most daunting is a growing state budget deficit. While long term care appears to be escaping major cuts in a supplemental FY 2010 state budget. However the FY 2011 budget beginning on July 1, 2010 may include reductions in state Medicaid spending if millions of dollars in federal stimulus Medicaid funds are not renewed for 2011. The Medicare and Medicaid components in the final federal health care reform law, although not taking effect immediately, may also circumscribe the choices for state policymakers. Meanwhile the wave of the "silver tsunami" of the baby boomer generation is gathering. There is no time to rest on our laurels.

Bill Flynn, Executive Director