



Waiting, Waiting, Waiting

Dear Friends,

For some time the Florida Legislature has been deeply divided over Medicaid expansion as a result of the Affordable Care Act, and this division runs through Brevard County. One sympathetic Brevard legislator said that he grieved over the potential loss of Medicaid expansion, while another suggested that expansion dollars had to be borrowed from China and would put us on the same path as Greece.

Given the amount of money on the table for discussion, the consideration for the legislature are staggering and demand a cautious approach. However, as so often happens in our public discourse, the cautious approach is abandoned in favor of gridlock and those who have need of legislative action are left hanging in the lurch. I refer here to seniors with expensive long term care needs, particularly those who require some degree of care at home. The Governor and legislature are failing these seniors terribly.

This failure is highlighted by the existence of a waiting list for Medicaid services at home. (Medicaid inpatient nursing home services are available at all times).

Supposedly, when funding becomes available for non-nursing home services, individuals are moved off the waiting list based on their medical need, referred to as the Activities of Daily Living ("ADLs"), which generally includes eating, bathing, dressing, toileting, transferring, and walking. Those individuals occupying the waiting list are priority-ranked according to their needs on a scale of 1 to 8, with 1 being an individual with a minimal amount of need and 8 being an individual with the need to be sheltered by the Department of Children and Families.

My understanding from the Department of Elder Affairs is that statewide there are currently more than 45,000 individuals on the waiting list, which I find alarming. What I find more even more alarming is that roughly 30% of those individuals are ranked 4 to 8 on the scale, which means they have a significant medical need for services and are forced to wait. I imagine a large number of these seniors are veterans or the widows of veterans. Unfortunately,

these individuals do not appear to be any meaningful part of the dialogue in Tallahassee. Florida's newest budget may provide a few million dollars more for non-nursing home care, which may offer relief to 400 or 500 people, but this is woefully inadequate given how many are in need and waiting. Moreover, this is also ultimately costly to taxpayers. If assistance cannot be delivered at home, many of the individuals on the waiting list will have no choice but to pursue Medicaid nursing home benefits because they can wait no longer. These Medicaid nursing home benefits are the most burdensome to taxpayers. It is simply more cost effective to provide individuals care at home or, in some cases,

through an assisted living facility.

No senior should have to face the prospect of nursing home placement because Florida's government is unable to come to terms with new economic and demographic realities. They can and should do better. We have an obligation to our loved ones and to ourselves to insist that they do.

Joe Steckler is the President of Helping Seniors of Brevard, a nonprofit organization designed to advocate, educate, and fundraise on behalf of Brevard's senior citizens. Feel free to contact us at: info@helpingseniorsofbrevard.org or calling: 321-473-7770. **SS**



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