

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 2814

To amend title XI of the Social Security Act to direct the Commissioner of Social Security to conduct outreach efforts to increase awareness of the availability of medicare cost-sharing assistance to eligible low-income medicare beneficiaries.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 29, 2000

Mr. McCONNELL introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance

A BILL

To amend title XI of the Social Security Act to direct the Commissioner of Social Security to conduct outreach efforts to increase awareness of the availability of medicare cost-sharing assistance to eligible low-income medicare beneficiaries.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Low-Income Widows
5 Assistance Act of 2000”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) Since 1988, 3 cost-sharing payment pro-
2 grams that provide certain low-income elderly and
3 disabled individuals with financial assistance in cov-
4 ering medicare beneficiary costs under title XVIII of
5 the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395 et seq.)
6 have been established by law.

7 (2) While eligibility for medicare cost-sharing
8 assistance has expanded, and while the Social Secu-
9 rity Administration, the Health Care Financing Ad-
10 ministration, and State agencies are working coop-
11 eratively to identify and implement reforms to cure
12 the chronic deficiencies associated with the programs
13 described in paragraph (1), reports have shown that
14 gaps in beneficiary knowledge and deficiencies in
15 program administration by Federal and State agen-
16 cies present persistent barriers to enrolling eligible
17 beneficiaries in such programs.

18 (3) The financial plight of social security and
19 medicare beneficiaries who experience critical income
20 shifts due to the death of a spouse is of particular
21 concern. Statistics furnished by the Social Security
22 Administration show that 40 percent of nonmarried
23 women (a category that includes widows) rely on so-
24 cial security benefits for 90 percent of their income
25 in comparison to only 18 percent of married couples.

1 Further, nearly ¼ of nonmarried women rely on so-
2 cial security retirement benefits as their sole source
3 of income.

4 (4) While current reform proposals concentrate
5 on reaching potential eligible beneficiaries upon ini-
6 tial enrollment in social security or medicare, the fi-
7 nancial vulnerability of widowed spouses can arise at
8 any time after a senior has begun to receive retire-
9 ment benefits.

10 (5) Nearly every legislative proposal to provide
11 an outpatient prescription drug benefit under the
12 medicare program would provide additional financial
13 assistance to medicare beneficiaries who currently
14 qualify for assistance under medicare cost-sharing
15 programs.

16 **SEC. 3. OUTREACH EFFORTS.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—Title XI of the Social Security Act
18 (42 U.S.C. 1301 et seq.) is amended by inserting after
19 section 1143 the following new section:

20 “OUTREACH EFFORTS TO INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE
21 AVAILABILITY OF MEDICARE COST-SHARING

22 “SEC. 1144. (a) OUTREACH.—

23 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Commissioner of So-
24 cial Security (in this section referred to as the ‘Com-
25 missioner’) shall conduct outreach efforts to—

1 “(A) identify individuals entitled to bene-
2 fits under the medicare program under title
3 XVIII who may be eligible for medical assist-
4 ance for payment of the cost of medicare cost-
5 sharing under the medicaid program pursuant
6 to sections 1902(a)(10)(E) and 1933; and

7 “(B) notify such individuals of the avail-
8 ability of such medical assistance under such
9 sections.

10 “(2) CONTENT OF NOTICE.—Any notice fur-
11 nished under paragraph (1) shall state that eligi-
12 bility for medicare cost-sharing assistance under
13 such sections is conditioned upon the individual pro-
14 viding an accurate statement as to whether or not
15 the individual has tax-exempt income, and, if so, the
16 amount of such income and, in the case of an indi-
17 vidual residing in a State that imposes an asset test
18 for such eligibility, the amount of countable assets
19 the individual has.

20 “(b) COORDINATION WITH STATES.—

21 “(1) IN GENERAL.—In conducting the outreach
22 efforts under this section, the Commissioner shall—

23 “(A) furnish the appropriate agency of
24 each State with information consisting of the
25 identity of individuals residing in the State that

1 the Commissioner determines are or may be eli-
2 gible for medical assistance for payment of the
3 cost of medicare cost-sharing under the med-
4 icaid program pursuant to sections
5 1902(a)(10)(E) and 1933; and

6 “(B) update any such information not less
7 frequently than annually.

8 “(2) INFORMATION IN UPDATES.—The updates
9 described in paragraph (1)(B) shall include informa-
10 tion on individuals who are or may be eligible for the
11 medical assistance described in paragraph (1)(A) be-
12 cause such individuals have experienced reductions
13 in benefits under title II.”.

14 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by
15 subsection (a) shall take effect one year after the date of
16 the enactment of this Act.

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