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Governor Rell and Rep. Schofield Remind Medicare Recipients That Help is Available to Pay Premiums and Copays

*State's 'Medicare Savings Programs' Now Paying
Part B Premiums for Nearly 83,000 Enrollees*

Governor M. Jodi Rell and Rep. Linda Schofield today announced that many seniors and individuals with disabilities who rely on Medicare can save nearly \$100 in monthly premiums and other costs by enrolling in the state's expanded Medicare Savings programs.

"This is a great opportunity for Medicare beneficiaries to save money on their coverage, particularly in this difficult economy where every dollar counts," Governor Rell said. "Simply put, this means extra money in their Social Security check each month."

The Governor said nearly 83,000 individuals have already enrolled in the Medicare Savings Program and estimates they are saving nearly \$97 million a year in premiums alone. As a result of legislation introduced by Rep. Schofield, the eligibility level for Medicare Savings programs was raised to match that of ConnPACE, thereby making more people eligible for this federally matched program, and saving the state money in the ConnPACE program.

"I'm very pleased that we were able to pass this legislation," said Rep. Schofield. "I have been contacted by several seniors who have taken advantage of the new benefit, and they've told me that they've saved a lot of money, not only because their part B premiums are now paid, but also because they have much lower drug copays."

Medicare beneficiaries who enroll in the Medicare Savings Programs save the full amount of their Medicare Part B premiums – usually \$96.40 per month. In some cases, the co-payments and deductibles for Medicare A and B services are covered as well. Part A covers hospital charges. Part B covers doctor visits and other services.

"Since the federal government deducts Medicare premiums from Social Security checks, eligible seniors and citizens with disabilities will get to keep more of their hard-earned Social Security benefits by joining a Medicare Savings Program," the Governor said.

Enrolling in Connecticut's Medicare Savings Programs will also help people save on the Medicare Part D prescription drug program. Medicare Savings Program members are automatically entitled to the federally-funded Medicare Part D "low-income subsidy," which lowers co-payments on medications and pays deductibles.

A change in state law in October 2009 expanded eligibility for the Medicare Savings Programs, raising the income limits and eliminating asset limits. The income limit to qualify for the Medicare Savings Programs is now \$25,100 annually for individuals or \$33,800 for couples.

“My administration worked with the General Assembly to make these major savings possible for our seniors and people with disabilities with modest incomes,” Governor Rell said, acknowledging Representative Linda Schofield (16th District) as the main legislative proponent.

An estimated 23,000 members of the ConnPACE prescription drug assistance program may now be eligible for the Medicare Savings Programs due to the statutory change, though not all have yet applied. As more ConnPACE members enroll, state taxpayers also benefit as the federal ‘low income subsidy’ replaces state-funded prescription drug assistance in filling gaps in Medicare Part D coverage.

Overall, enrollment in the Medicare Savings Programs has risen from 71,316 in October 2009 to 82,945 this February, the most recent month for which statistics are available. The additional 11,629 enrollees are saving over \$13.5 million in Medicare Part B premiums. Many are also saving on co-payments and deductibles.

Funding for the Medicare Savings Programs is provided by Medicaid, the federal/state health coverage program. The federal government currently reimburses Connecticut for about 62 percent of up-front Medicaid expenditures.

For information about joining the Medicare Savings Programs, people can visit www.ct.gov/dss/medicaresavingsprograms; or call 2-1-1 Infoline, or CHOICES at 1-800-994-9422 (both toll-free).