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Friday, Aug. 21, 2009

Warren R. Slavin: Budget cuts unfairly target elderly

Warren R. Slavin | Commentary

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As a nonprofit provider of elder care for almost 100 years, the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington has the challenge of providing quality health care to our region's elderly amid the current economic crisis. Compounding this challenge is Maryland's decision to cut nursing home reimbursement by a staggering \$23 million. Perhaps equally troubling is the fact that this cut only saves the state \$8.8 million after the elimination of \$14.2 million in matching federal funds that would have been available to nursing home residents.

Over the last four years, the state has reduced nursing home reimbursement well in excess of \$130 million. In our organization, these reductions are compounded by declining earnings on endowments that are typically used to provide charitable care to the elderly residents of Montgomery County and surrounding communities.

Nursing home residents, most of whom have complex medical needs, are the frailest segment of Maryland's population. This latest reduction jeopardizes not only quality of care but their quality of life. Some nursing homes may have to close or discontinue their efforts to provide charity care, thereby jeopardizing access to quality nursing home care.

The challenges facing Maryland are difficult. However, in addressing Maryland's budget shortfall, essential health care services for our elderly should be the last services to be cut, not the first. Maryland needs to ensure that the steps it takes now in the short-term will not destroy the fabric of the health care system for our state's frail elderly in the long term. Don't our elders deserve better?

Warren R. Slavin, of Rockville, is president and CEO of the Charles E. Smith Life Communities/Hebrew Home of Greater Washington.

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