

Maryland seniors decry state of care

Elderly getting behind LifeSpan Honor the Promise campaign

Columbia, Md. – (May 28, 2007) – People have problems, 76-year-old Shirley admits, but seniors have bigger ones than most. “People don’t listen to us,” said the former Brandywine, Md. resident and member of Catholic Charities Senior Housing at Basilica Place in Baltimore. “And some of us still can’t afford our medicines.”

Shirley and nearly a dozen other seniors had met recently to show support for LifeSpan’s Honor the Promise campaign. The public pledge card campaign is designed to put pressure on Maryland’s decision-makers to improve access to and reduce paperwork involved in obtaining senior care, eliminate Medicaid roadblocks and waiting lists—especially for affordable housing—and attract more people to work in senior care.

Shirley and her compatriots had only good things to say about Basilica Place—but not much else when it came to senior issues.

From paperwork, to Medicare delays and long waits for affordable housing, Shirley says Maryland seniors aren’t respected, and LifeSpan President Isabella Firth agrees.

Firth, whose organization represents some 45,000 Maryland seniors and 300 providers of senior care across the Old Line state and the Washington, D.C. metro area, said seniors she talks to insist they are complaining about these things, but no one—not the media, elected representatives or the public—is listening. “We thought we would let them tell their story to see if we could capture the attention of journalists and the public,” said Firth.

Marion, 76, of Baltimore, was forced to retire early due to injury. At first,

she received more lip service than actual care. “They said you are going to do this

whether you like it or not,” she said, describing her first efforts at obtaining housing and senior care. Shirley added the need for senior services often comes as a shock. “I was doing fine before I became disabled,” she said. “I’m lucky I ended up at Basilica Place.”

Helen, 76, a Maryland native, pointed out that most people believe Medicaid covers everything—and that’s not true. “They don’t pay for glasses; dental care or hearing aids—most of the things we really need,” she insisted. “They treat us like second-class citizens.”

Herb, 71, of Baltimore, thinks it all comes down to respect. “Other societies respect their elderly—we don’t,” he softly insisted. “We’ve done poorly. And we need to do better.”

Ruth, 86, grew up in Baltimore, and said her years have taught her that if people don’t address problems, they won’t just go away. “The people who are going to retire soon are going to face disaster,” she opined. “And they’ll feel the same way we do—angry—because we are still the same people we were when we were younger. No one deserves to be on a waiting list for years to receive something they absolutely need.”

Herb says seniors are not asking for special treatment—just to be treated with respect. “They are leaving us with crumbs after a lifetime of sacrifices. No one cares,” he said. “A lot of people talk about helping seniors but they don’t do anything about it.”

Lillian, 80, also of Baltimore, noted everyone is going to age and that many wonderful people care about the elderly. That being said, she added we can do something about current and future problems facing seniors. “We vote,” she said. “But what we really want is for someone to listen and do something about these things. That’s why we are glad you are here today. Now, where do I sign that pledge card?”

Last names of seniors cited in this release have been deleted due to security and privacy concerns. To arrange interviews with these sources, obtain photos or for other information, contact Isabella Firth at (410) 381-1176, Ext. 226 or e-mail ifirth@malifespan.org.

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