



**Testimony in Support of H 5529 – Medicare Savings Program
House Committee on Finance
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The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Rep. Alzate’s H 5529, which would benefit low-income seniors and disabled Rhode Islanders by expanding eligibility and health coverage through the Medicare Savings Program.

All Rhode Islanders deserve quality affordable healthcare that doesn’t force them to choose between paying their rent or paying for their prescriptions. Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, Rhode Island has achieved one of the lowest uninsured rates in the country, and nearly half of Rhode Islanders (approximately 470,000) receive their health coverage through the public programs Medicaid and Medicare. However, for many low-income Rhode Islanders, out of pocket healthcare costs have skyrocketed in ways that benefits, wages and fixed incomes have not – forcing many to delay care or forgo prescription medication due to the costs.

Fortunately, the state of New York devised and implemented legislation (with federal approval) to expand eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program using primarily federal funds. Local healthcare advocates have adopted this approach for Rhode Island via H 5529. H 5529 would expand eligibility for Medicare recipients and would make about 17,000 people newly eligible for the Extra Help program at NO COST to the state; it would exclusively use existing federal funding. This expansion would put approximately \$35 million back into the hands of Rhode Islanders, and into the economy, by paying for the Medicare Part B premiums. It would also cover the costs of copayments and deductibles for 6,000 existing participants in the Medicare Savings Program, as well as their monthly premium, and 600 people would be newly eligible for this benefit. The cost of the QMB expansion would be approximately \$5.4 million to the state, with additional money in federal contributions.

H 5529 would improve equity and healthcare access and affordability for low-income seniors and disabled Rhode Islanders, while also putting more money in their pockets. This is a relatively small investment that would not only improve health outcomes, but also create an infusion of federal dollars that would be almost immediately circulated back into the RI economy. The Economic Progress Institute strongly urges passage.