



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wolf Administration Reminds Older Adults of Their Rights Regarding Stimulus Checks

Harrisburg, PA – As Pennsylvanians continue to receive federal stimulus payments as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Pennsylvania departments of Aging, Human Services (DHS) and Insurance remind consumers living in long-term care facilities that these checks belong to them, not the facilities where they live.

“We have received complaints from residents of long-term care facilities being told that their federal stimulus checks count as income that must be surrendered, in part or in whole, to pay for services. Residents should know that this is not true,” said Pennsylvania State Long-Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman Margaret Barajas of the Pennsylvania Department of Aging. “The stimulus checks were issued with the expectation that they would be used to stimulate the economy, not to settle up past debt. The State Ombudsman is committed to advocating for and resolving these issues for older adults, case-by-case.”

The Department of Human Services has issued guidance for how economic impact payments affect the eligibility of those living in long-term care for Pennsylvania's Medicaid program, Medical Assistance (MA). This guidance directs that the economic payment is not considered income for the purposes of MA eligibility. The portion of the economic impact payments that are spent within 12 months of receipt is also considered an excluded resource for MA eligibility. There should be no change to a resident's monthly charges in their contract due to this payment. Residents may direct their concerns or complaints to the Assisted Living Complaint Hotline at 877-401-8835 .

"We want to assure residents of these facilities that these stimulus payments are theirs – it is not meant to be a rent rebate," said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. "No one should worry that accepting this payment will affect their ability to keep Medicaid eligibility or their housing. The Department of Aging and DHS are working closely together to make sure that people who live in long-term care facilities are aware of their rights to this economic payment. Any resident of a facility who is concerned that their payment is in jeopardy should reach out to the Pennsylvania State Long-Term Care Ombudsman right away."

People who are single with an income below \$12,200 or married with an income below \$24,400, that do not receive Social Security or SSI and did not file their taxes in 2018 or 2019 can submit a non-filers form any time until the end of calendar year 2020 and receive their stimulus check.

“The Insurance Department is alarmed by complaints from Pennsylvanians questioning a facility’s right to a resident’s federal stimulus check,” said Commissioner Jessica Altman. “We are dedicated to making sure all Pennsylvanians are aware that the Federal Trade Commission has made very clear that stimulus income should not be considered a ‘resource’ in federal benefit programs and that nursing homes and assisted living facilities may not seize stimulus payments from residents simply because they are on Medicaid.”

“Our job at the Department of Aging is to protect the safety and well-being of older adults and to empower them to live as independently as possible,” said Aging Secretary Robert Torres. “Part of that involves making sure older adults, whatever their living situation, know their rights and where they can turn to for help and information. The federal government has made it clear that these stimulus payments should go directly to the individual whose name is on the check. If an older adult or their loved one has concerns, they should seek help.”

Consumers with concerns should call the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s Office at 800-441-2555 . But if they need some extra help preparing to make their complaint, the Department of Aging’s LTC State Ombudsman is happy to offer support. The number to call for help is 717-783-8975 .

Sec. Torres also noted that consumers should be aware that the U.S. Treasury and the IRS are starting to send nearly 4 million Economic Impact Payments (EIPs) by prepaid debit card, instead of by paper check. These cards arrive in a plain white envelope. EIP Card recipients can make purchases, get cash from in-network ATMs, and transfer funds to their personal bank account without incurring any fees. The EIP Card can be used online, at ATMs, or at any retail location where Visa is accepted. To learn more about stimulus payment eligibility or check on the status of a payment, visit www.irs.gov/coronavirus.

The LTC Ombudsman recently launched a new statewide resource called Virtual Family Council, which offers families a chance to connect with a local ombudsman and other experts to ask questions and discuss protocols, rights and procedures for their loved ones in long-term care facilities. The meetings are held weekly and do not address specific issues regarding a resident or a facility. Learn more about the LTC ombudsman and various programs offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging [here](#).