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DHHR to return to previous criteria for senior citizen in-home care

In response to constituent concerns, Governor Joe Manchin last week directed Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) Secretary Martha Walker and her staff to conduct a full evaluation of the state's Medicaid Aged and Disabled program. The Governor made it clear that his stance on the subject of in-home care had not changed since his first days in the legislature over 20 years ago and that he remained committed to helping both the state's senior and disabled citizens, based upon their financial and physical needs, get the assistance necessary for them to live as long as they can in their own homes with the pride and dignity they deserve.

Secretary Walker today informed the Governor that she has completed the requested evaluation and based upon new data recently developed by DHHR as part of its scheduled evaluation process she is directing her staff to immediately return to the pre-November 2005 eligibility requirements for the Aged and Disabled waiver.

"In an attempt to maximize services," stated Medicaid Commissioner Nancy Atkins, "We made eligibility requirements too stringent."

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In returning to the pre-November 2005 levels, all persons denied services between November 2005 and now will be systematically reevaluated using the pre-November 2005 guidelines.

The Secretary has also taken the additional step of requiring that all individuals currently referred for in-home care services on the Medicaid Aged and Disabled waiver be evaluated for acceptance into the program. The money needed for this action will be asked for as part of a supplemental appropriation request to the legislature.

According to Secretary Walker, "The Governor has made it clear from the beginning that his intention was to help as many people as possible, in the fairest and most responsible manner possible, with the resources we have available - which is why he added money in both of the last two fiscal years to our aged and disabled budget."

"Now that we know that our new eligibility requirements are too strict," said Walker, "our agency will go back to the beginning of the process and work diligently to get the program back on the right track."