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May 22, 2017

The Honorable Ricardo Lara
Chair, Senate Appropriation Committee
State Capitol, Room 2206
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 202 (Dodd) Medi-Cal: beneficiary maintenance needs: personal needs allowance – Support
As Introduced January 31, 2017
Senate Appropriations Committee - Suspense File

Dear Senator Lara,

The Consumer Federation of California writes in support of SB 202 (Dodd), which would increase the dollar amount residents on Medi-Cal, who live in skilled nursing facilities, receive each month to cover their “personal and incidental” expenses from the current \$35 to \$80 per month.

In 1984, the California legislature acted to supplement the long-standing \$30 per month personal need allowance provided by the Federal government with an additional \$5, for a total of \$35 per month. This amount has not been increased in 33 years. Residents cannot afford to pay for reasonable personal items like hearing aid batteries, over the counter medications, and incontinence care products on this small amount of money.

For many seniors transitioning from the living independently in their own home to sharing a room in a skilled nursing facility, dependent on Medi-Cal to cover the great expense of nursing care is in itself demoralizing. The further indignities of having no or minimal control of your day-to-day activities makes every remaining area of control that much more significant.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than 50 percent of nursing home residents have no close relatives, and 46% have no living children. It is estimated 60% of California Skilled Nursing Home residents do not have regular visitors. These seniors are completely dependent on their Personal and Incidental Needs Allowance to pay for all of their clothing, shoes, and the occasional treat like a candy bar.

Having \$80 per month rather than \$35 means California residents in skilled nursing facilities may have the opportunity to purchase a greeting card to honor a grandchild’s recent accomplishment and the .47 cents to be able to mail the card. An increase in the personal needs allowance may allow them the opportunity to both purchase hearing aid batteries and attend an “outing”. Personal autonomy, dignity, and a sense of personal attractiveness are feelings of self-worth that help residents feel connected to the world around them - this is what \$80 can purchase. No senior

should have to be forced to decide between hearing or spending the next 31 days never leaving the facility, only being able to watch others leave on the facility bus for an adventure.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your “Aye” vote on SB 202.

If you or your staff has any questions, please contact Aaron Lewis, CFC Legislative Advocate, at (916) 498-9616.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Holober". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard Holober
Executive Director