Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.
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ADVOCACY GROUP URGES EXTENSION OF PART D ENROLLMENT DEADLINE

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The Center for Medicare Advocacy is disappointed that the Senate rejected a proposal to extend the initial enrollment period for Medicare Part D, the new prescription drug benefit, past the May 15th deadline. This means that Medicare beneficiaries who do not sign up by May 15th will be penalized. Instead the Senate passed a non-binding resolution, leaving the enrollment deadline to the discretion of the Secretary of Health and Human Services, who has already shown disregard to the interests of Medicare beneficiaries during the implementation of the drug benefit and has expressed support for the pending enrollment deadline.

Medicare Part D makes it exceedingly difficult for Medicare beneficiaries who need assistance with drug coverage to enroll in a drug plan, use their plan should they enroll, and appeal a Part D denial of medication coverage. The overwhelming number of plans from which beneficiaries must choose, with their confusing variety of covered drugs, cost management tools, and appeal processes makes it almost impossible for beneficiaries to figure out which plan works for them in time to enroll by May 15th. Further, some beneficiaries without drug coverage now, who want to enroll in a plan, cannot do so: they cannot afford the premiums and cost sharing but their "extra help" subsidy applications have not yet been processed by Social Security, with no guarantee that their applications will be approved before May 15th.

Congress should extend the initial enrollment period for Medicare Part D beyond May 15th. Don't penalize the very people this program was meant to benefit.