

## House Republican Press Release

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### Seniors, Autism Issues Addressed By General Assembly



#### *Capitol Commentary* *By State Rep. Mary Ann Carson*

The Legislature approved several bills to address Seniors' health issues this year, including the 'Money Follows The Person' legislation. This concept has been discussed in State Capitol for several years.

On Wednesday, May 7, the House of Representatives approved Senate Bill 561, An Act Concerning The Money Follows The Person Project, which will use Medicaid funds to provide care so that people can remain in their own homes, rather than receive care in a nursing home. This program has been advocated as a way to make sure that those who want to remain in their homes with family and loved ones may and are not restricted to an institutional setting. Over time, this type of setting will be cost effective and lessen the financial burden nursing homes place on taxpayers.

According to the non-partisan Office of Legislative Research (OLR), SB 561 would increase, from 700 to 5,000, the number of individuals who can be served under the state's plan for participating in the federal Money Follows the Person (MFP) Demonstration program. MFP is a five-year program. The bill requires, instead of allows, the Department of Social Services (DSS) to submit an application to the federal government. DSS has developed a protocol for the demonstration, which needs federal approval before it can be implemented.

The bill also requires DSS to develop a plan to establish and administer a similar home- and community-based services (HCBS) project for adults who may not meet the MFP institutionalization requirement. The bill now goes to Governor M. Jodi Rell for final approval.

Public Act 08-63, An Act Concerning Expansion Of The Pilot Program For Persons With Autism Spectrum Disorders, was signed into law by Governor Rell on May 12. It expands the number of people who can participate in the Department of Developmental Services' (DDS) pilot program for adults with autism spectrum disorders but not mental retardation. The program, which was created in 2006, provides coordinated services and support, including case management, for people not otherwise eligible for DDS services and their families.

The act requires DDS to ensure that eligible adults living outside the pilot's existing service area (parts of New Haven and Middlesex counties) have access to the expanded slots. The act extends the pilot's end date by nine months, from October 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009. The law requires DSS to report on the pilot's results by January 1, 2009.

Additional legislation impacting autism issues includes Public Act 08-132, which was approved by the State Senate on May 7 and awaits final approval from Governor Rell. It would require health insurance policies in Connecticut effective on or after January 1, 2009 to cover physical, speech, and occupational therapy services provided to treat autism spectrum disorders if the policies cover these services for other diseases and conditions. It defines "autism spectrum disorder" as the American Psychiatric Association's most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders uses the phrase.

It applies this requirement to group and individual health insurance policies that cover basic hospital, medical-surgical, or major medical expenses; HMO contracts covering hospital and medical expenses; and hospital or medical service contracts. Due to federal law, this requirement does not apply to self-insured plans.

Finally, on May 2, the State Senate gave final legislative approval to Public Act 08-91, An Act Concerning A Pilot Program for Small House Nursing Homes. The legislation, which awaits final approval from Gov. Rell, directs the Department of Social Services (DSS) to help develop up to 10 small house nursing homes to provide services in a home-like setting rather than an institutional setting.

DSS must weigh a number of criteria before making a final decision on which existing nursing homes may be eligible for this and must give priority to proposals that convert existing nursing homes into small house nursing homes or that use energy efficiency technology, including fuel cells.

I again look forward to providing details of additional bills that moved through the process in the weeks to come.

*Editors Note: State Representative Mary Ann Carson represents Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford and Sherman in the Connecticut General Assembly.*