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## Legislative Leaders Voice Support for Home Care

*During home care Advocacy Day, legislative leaders echo HCA's call to apply FMAP funding to offset Medicaid health care cuts, as home care services face a \$475 million hit under proposed 2009-10 State Budget*

Recognizing the impact of nearly a half-billion dollars in proposed State Budget cuts on patient services, state legislators addressed New York's home care community during HCA's 2009 Advocacy Day on February 25, stressing the importance of New York's home care safety net for the frail elderly, persons with disabilities, the chronically ill, and patients in need of post-acute care.

Assembly Majority Leader **Ron Canestrari** (D-Cohoes), Senate Health Committee Chairman **Tom Duane** (D-Manhattan), Assembly Health Committee Chairman **Richard Gottfried** (D-Manhattan), and Senator **Craig Johnson** (D-Port Washington) all echoed HCA's contention that the \$11 billion in Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) money coming to New York under the economic stimulus package recently passed by Congress should be used squarely for the Medicaid program and to offset the home care and other health care cuts contained in Governor Paterson's 2009-10 Executive State Budget proposal.

"We must keep Medicaid dollars for Medicaid programs," Assemblyman Canestrari told home care advocates during HCA's Advocacy Day program.

Assemblyman Canestrari also questioned a budget proposal that would prohibit certain home care agencies from subcontracting with licensed home care services agencies (LHCSAs) for home health aide services – a proposal that offers no substantiated cost-savings to Medicaid and has been advanced without data or analysis justifying its intent. In fact, HCA has argued, the proposed subcontracting prohibition will only increase Medicaid costs and lead to service and staff cutbacks since very few non-LHCSA agencies have the infrastructure or operating margins to absorb all of their home health aide services directly.

"The prohibition on subcontracting makes no sense to me whatsoever," said Assemblyman Canestrari. "Why restructure something when it works?"

Senator Duane also voiced support for applying FMAP dollars towards home health services, saying, "We are in tough times, but sledgehammer cuts are a terrible idea. When it comes to FMAP dollars, my job will be to make sure that we get to keep those dollars where they need to be."

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Senator Duane added: “Your profession is an economic engine for New York State at the same time that you are helping the most vulnerable and ensuring that patients in many cases do not have to enter institutions.”

Assemblyman Gottfried noted that New York State must use the additional FMAP funding to eliminate indiscriminate funding cuts that have no basis in health policy.

“I believe that the federal money ought to enable us to avoid doing the Medicaid cuts that are clearly cutting for the sake of cutting and which are clearly not anyone’s idea of a programmatic change in the health care system,” Assemblyman Gottfried said.

“I am confident that during the rest of today and in days to come, you will continue to be very effective in getting your message out and I look forward to working with you,” Assemblyman Gottfried told home care advocates.

Senator Johnson shared a personal example of how home care benefited his family in a time of need, noting that his mother had received home care services at the end of her life.

“When my mother was given a terminal diagnosis, we made the conscious decision to bring her home and we brought in a home health care agency to help us through this process,” Senator Johnson said. “I can’t tell you what a godsend those individuals were who not only provided loving care but who became a part of our family for a period of time.”

Regarding FMAP funding, Senator Johnson added: “Washington is offering us a lifeline for the time being when it comes to Medicaid and we need to take it for Medicaid. We need to make sure that the dollars from Medicaid go to groups such as yourselves to help the people that you help.”

As part of its Advocacy Day program, HCA has delivered to all state lawmakers a magazine-style publication entitled *On the Edge: Unprecedented Home Care Cuts Threaten NY’s Home Care System* which details the proposed funding cuts, offers alternative solutions for making Medicaid more cost-efficient through the affirmative use of home care services, and conveys the human side of home care. *On the Edge* can be found online at <http://www.hca-nys.org/Edge.pdf>.

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*The Home Care Association of New York State (HCA) represents approximately 400 health care providers, organizations and individuals who collectively provide or advocate for the provision of home care services to thousands of New Yorkers. HCA has committed itself to the principles of high-quality and cost-effective home and community-based health care, assisting with program development and operations, as well as state and federal policy, regulation and reimbursement issues, with the aim of enabling providers to meet the needs of the individuals and communities they serve.*