

Jewish Disability Advocacy Day



The Jewish Federations
OF NORTH AMERICA



Help Individuals with Disabilities and Older Adults Return Home: Co-Sponsor and Promptly Pass the EMPOWER Care Act

The future of the bipartisan-supported **Money Follows the Person (MFP) program** — one of the longest running and most successful demonstrations in Medicaid — remains in jeopardy. It is now time for Congress to pass a five-year reauthorization to stabilize this vital program. The bipartisan **Ensuring Medicaid Provides Opportunities for Widespread Equity, Resources, and Care Act (also known as the “EMPOWER Care Act”)**, soon to be re-introduced by Representatives Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Brett Guthrie (R-KY), would extend MFP for five more years with small but key improvements while continuing its evaluation. The bipartisan, bicameral EMPOWER Care Act sponsored by Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Maria Cantwell and Representatives Dingell and Guthrie was introduced in the last Congress as S.2227/H.R. 5306.

MFP helps individuals with disabilities and older adults return home to live in their communities with appropriate services and supports. First authorized in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 with strong bipartisan support and signed into law by President George W. Bush, MFP significantly improves the lives of vulnerable, low-income older adults and people with disabilities covered by Medicaid.

Congress recently unanimously enacted a short-term, extension for MFP as part of the Medicaid Extenders Act of 2019 (Pub. L. 116-3, Jan. 24, 2019). This extension provides \$112 million for the remaining 33 state MFP programs to continue operating for a few months, but states will exhaust this funding by or before this September. Reauthorization is necessary to stabilize the program and permit its expansion to all interested states.

If Congress does not reauthorize MFP, the progress made by nearly 90,000 older adults and people with disabilities who have moved out of nursing homes and other institutions will be reversed. MFP's future is far from assured. **We need Congress to take action and promptly pass the EMPOWER Care Act.**

Why Pass the EMPOWER Care Act?

- **MFP assists older adults and people with disabilities make the transition from living in an institution (such as a nursing home) to living in the community** with appropriate housing, services and supports. Many clients of JFNA's Jewish partner agencies that provide home- and community-based services to older adults and people with disabilities receive assistance from the MFP program. MFP can help pay for first month's rent, security deposits, and basic furnishings, for example.
- **MFP assists with transition costs** associated with moving people out of institutions and back into apartments, homes, and community-based settings. MFP also assists states to develop the infrastructure to promote and enhance access to home and community-based services (HCBS).

- **MFP's authorization expired in 2016.** Twelve states exhausted their funding early in 2018 and are not eligible for the short-term funding. If MFP is not reauthorized, states will greatly scale back the number of people they are transitioning.
- **MFP enhances opportunities to live independently and with dignity.** In a 2017 Report to Congress, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) found that participants experienced significant and lasting improvements across all seven quality-of-life domains measured. CMS also found that MFP participants are less likely to be readmitted to institutional care than other beneficiaries who transition without participating in the program.
- **MFP saves money.** Providing long-term services and supports in the home is more cost effective than institutional care. Independent evaluation by the nonpartisan, research firm Mathematica found that MFP reduced overall Medicare and Medicaid spending on participants by roughly 20% (Mathematica, 2017).
- **MFP has helped states "rebalance" their spending on long-term services and supports.** In FY 2005, states spent approximately 37% of their long-term services and supports funds on HCBS. According to recent data, states now spend over 53% of these funds on HCBS.
- **The EMPOWER Care Act makes improvements to MFP.** Evidence shows that longer institutional stays make it harder for people to transition back out. The EMPOWER Care Act reduces the number of days beneficiaries must reside in an institution from 90 to 60 days before becoming eligible to transition. The legislation also enhances the reporting and accountability of MFP funding, and requires the Department of Health and Human Services to evaluate best practices and effective state strategies.

Please urge your member of Congress to co-sponsor and promptly pass the EMPOWER Care Act.

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