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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

United We Matter is a volunteer organization, comprised of elderly and disabled State retirees, that was created in direct response to legislation passed by the Maryland General Assembly that eliminated prescription drug coverage for State Retirees 65 and older or disabled. It seeks to preserve the rights, pensions, and benefits of retired Maryland State employees. Our current fight is to reinstate a benefit that was earned by State retirees after years of dedicated service – prescription drug coverage.

Below is the latest legislative update. This applies to active and retirees who vested (had at least five years) in the Prescription drug program prior to July 1, 2011

A. PRIOR HISTORY

Every year beginning in 2019, Ken Fitch and United We Matter has been able to get a lawmaker to submit a bill to reinstate prescription drug coverage for State retirees who vested in the Prescription drug program. They are:

2019

2019 - Delegate Eric Bromwell (D) House – withdrew his bill the day of the hearing and supported SB 946.

2019 - Senator Kathy Klausmeier(D) Senate – withdrew her bill to support SB 946.

(Only **FOUR** lawmakers Delegate Dan Cox, Delegate Paul Corderman, Delegate Johnny Mautz and Delegate Lauren Arian voted AGAINST SB 946)

SB 946 was sponsored by Senator Melonie Griffith; this bill requires that State retirees pay for their prescription drug costs and then be reimbursed by the State. The problem is that Medicare Part D does not have generic substitutes for most life saving

medications, i.e., cancer, diabetes, etc. So the cost of these drugs are prohibitive for State Retirees on fixed income. As well as the program has not been created as of today.

2020

2020 – Delegate Joe Boteler (R) House. Delegate Joe Boteler had voted FOR SB946. Delegate Boteler was invited to the first United We Matter Annual Meeting where he listened and empathized with the plight of State Retirees after our question and answer session. He said SB946 was wrong and therefore introduced a bill to reinstate prescription drug coverage for eligible State Retirees. His bill never got out of the House Appropriations Committee. Since the pandemic lockdowns occurred during the 2020 session, only the most important bills were allowed to go through the legislature. This bill was not considered important by the House leadership.

2021

2021. Delegate Carl Jackson (D) House. Delegate Jackson submitted the reinstatement bill late so instead of going to the House Appropriations Committee, it was assigned to the Rules Committee – and there it stayed. The Car and Sidewalk Rallies as well as the Telephone Campaign held by United We Matter had a lot of affect. Efforts were made to attach the State Retiree Prescription Bill to another bill for passage. Delegate Jackson withdrew the bill from consideration reportedly in exchange for favors for his district. (Please note that this has been alleged, but not proven.) What is real is that he withdrew the bill.

2022

2022. Delegate Joe Boteler (R) House. This time Ken Fitch and Deborah Hill, Esq. wrote the bill to reinstate coverage asking the legislature to grandfather in the retirees who had vested into the prescription drug program before July 1, 2011. Delegate Boteler pre-filed the bill.

2022 Senator Kathy Klausmeier (D) Senator. Senator Klausmeier agreed to sponsor Fitch/Hill bill even though she had withdrawn her support for reinstatement of the RX coverage in 2019. She pre-filed the bill.

In order to ensure passage, United We Matter members contacted their individual lawmakers to get them to co-sponsor the bill. We were successful in getting

15 Senators to co-sponsor the bill in the Senate and 42 Delegates to co-sponsor the bill in the House.

The bill was allowed to languish in the House Appropriation Committee and the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. In fact, each respective Chairman refused to call the bill for a vote.

2023

2023. Joe Boteler who had been a champion of Retirees in this fight was not re-elected in 2022. Ken Fitch was successful in finding another sponsor for our bill to reinstate. This Delegate was newly elected and submitted the bill early to ensure that we would get a bill number. That Delegate was told that it would take a while to score the Fiscal and Policy Notes to accompany bill. The Delegate was not aware that this bill had been written up four previous times and that waiting for something they already had was hogwash. This should be chalked up to inexperience. Anyway when the Delegate's staff realized what was going on, it was too late to acquire a bill number. That Delegate assured us that they would sponsor a bill in the House for the 2024 Session.

2024

2024 Well here we go again. Ken Fitch worked all summer to find a Senator who would sponsor the bill that he wrote in 2022. He was successful and was notified by the Senator that the bill would be pre-filed. We should have a bill number for the Senate and House bills in January. Then we will need all hands-on deck to get co-sponsors for these bills, participate in the Rallies and the Call in Campaign.

From the beginning, Ken Fitch has championed a two-prong approach to the prescription drug fight. Knowing that the legislature could easily take away what they give (that's how this fight started) Ken Fitch wanted legal backup so that if we did get the legislature to reinstate the coverage, the Courts would not allow them to change it. The legislature has not been kind to the elderly or disabled retirees who gave the majority of their working lives to the State of Maryland. And until this year, the Courts were on our side. However like Zig Ziglar says, "When obstacles arise, you change your direction to reach your goal, you do not change your decision to get there".

We must continue this fight until they have no choice but to concede and restore what they so wrongly took away.

United We Matter is raising money for advertising (radio, newspaper and TV) to make more State retirees aware of what has happened. We have already begun the Save A Senior Media Blitz. You can visit the webpage to see where you can find the latest advertisements. If you wish to donate by debit or credit card go to www.unitedwematter.com/donate. If you wish to donate by check, please send it to United We Matter., P.O. Box 44102, Nottingham, MD 21236.

Help us fight against this injustice. Go to www.unitedwematter.com and click JOIN US.

Respectfully,

United We Matter

Ken Fitch, President