



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

## What You Should Know

RUBEN DIAZ March 29, 2012

| ISSUE: **EPIC (ELDERLY PHARMACEUTICAL INSURANCE COVERAGE PROGRAM)**

What You Should Know

By

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What Have New York State Senior Citizens Done to Governor Andrew Cuomo?

What does Governor Andrew Cuomo have against the Senior Citizens of New York State?

You should know last year he refused to extend the Millionaires Tax, but apparently thought that it was appropriate to slash approximately \$58 million from EPIC, the State program that provides prescription drug insurance coverage for eligible Seniors. The impact of this cut, and the partial restoration of \$22 million, forced many seniors to be socked with a co-pay of 25% of the cost of their prescription drugs!

Apparently, Governor Cuomo was not satisfied with last year's proposal to cut services to Senior Citizens. This year the Governor recommended a \$48 million dollar cut to EPIC. The Senate Republicans, yes, you read that correctly, the Senate Republicans proposed to completely restore this cut in their one-house budget resolution, but were prevented by our own Democratic Legislators in the Assembly for including the full restoration in the final budget.

You should know that the Democratic Assembly, refused to include a single dollar in restoring EPIC. I cannot figure out for the life of me why the Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Democrat Sheldon Silver who controls the Assembly have allowed the Senate Republicans to look like the heroes and the protectors of Senior Citizens in the fight for EPIC.

So, where are we now? Final budget negotiations have restored \$30 million to EPIC. This restoration will mean that the maximum co-pay for EPIC will be \$20. Sounds great, doesn't it? Not so fast! After all, it is important that you should know that the Seniors of New York State will have to wait until January 1, 2013 to be able to benefit from this so-called victory. In other words, no Senior Citizen should get sick between now and January 2013.

I was not surprised when I read the following statement issued by AARP: "The average EPIC enrollee is a 78-year-old widow who takes four prescriptions. Since the devastating EPIC cut took effect on January 1 of this year, we have been hearing very troubling stories of seniors leaving the pharmacy counter without their medications because EPIC no longer provided co-pay assistance". You should know that these are the consequences of the cuts proposed by Governor Cuomo and voted for by the State Legislature.

Now we all have to ask: "What is this 78 year-old widow supposed to do between now and January 1, 2013?" Hope and pray that she doesn't get any sicker and find that she needs a fifth

or sixth prescription?

AARP and Statewide Senior Action Council, two of the major advocacy organizations for Seniors in New York State, are hailing this as a “win” and as a “victory” for Seniors. What win? What victory?

The Statewide Senior Action Council, another group that advocates for Senior Citizen’s rights, in its testimony during this year’s budget conference committee, stated that: “The cuts to the EPIC program which were enacted last year have taken full effect on January 1, 2012 and are a shock to many older persons. They are having a devastating impact on those with low incomes...” Some state legislators have told us they didn’t realize that what they voted for in the budget would lead to the devastating cuts in EPIC.”

Did I understand that correctly? Some legislators didn’t know that their votes would lead to such devastating cuts? What a travesty!

Well, there is no mistaking now what a vote in favor of this budget will do. It is true that co-pays will be limited to no more than \$20 for each prescription but not until January, 2013!

Until then, what are the seniors in my district and throughout the State supposed to do? You should know and remember that elderly New Yorkers don’t only live in the South Bronx. They live all over New York State: in Senator Roy McDonald’s District; in Senator Jim Alesi’s District; in Senator Mark Grisanti’s District; and even in Senator Stephen Saland’s District.

What are all these seniors supposed to do when their Senators, including the Black and Hispanic Senators are voting proudly and praising Governor Andrew Cuomo for a budget that hurts them the most?

I am Senator Rubén Díaz, and this is what you should know.