

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL DONATO
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**ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY
BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE
AND
THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS**

REGARDING
**MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF MEDICARE DRUG BENEFIT
IMPLEMENTATION**

February 2, 2005

Hi, Senator Smith, my name is Mike Donato and I live with my mom Daisy in Mansfield, Ohio. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder in 1995 and I've been on the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program since then.

Senator, I take medications for many health problems....everything from asthma to high blood pressure. But I particularly depend on my mental health drugs to live in the community with my friends and family. When I'm not on my medications, I tend to get sick and end up in the emergency room or the hospital. This is my first time in Washington, D.C. and I don't want to offend anybody, but it's fair to say that I don't like hospitals. Nice people, but the food is pretty bad.

I'd say that things got off to a pretty rocky start with this new Medicare drug program. For example, I'm in an AARP plan, but I never got a letter from them. Sharon Farr from the Center for Individual and Family Services had to find my enrollment online. In fact, she's been helping a lot these past few weeks. You'll hear from her in a moment. When I went to Walgreen's in early January to get my prescriptions filled, they said I owed them a total of \$700. I was afraid and, honestly, pretty panicked. Senator Smith, where I come from, that's a great deal of money.

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Most of all, though, I was worried about my mom. Daisy was very nervous about what would happen to me if I couldn't get my medications. Lord knows, she doesn't have the money to buy all the drugs I need to live.

Today, I sit here feeling very lucky. Now that Sharon's got me enrolled in this new Part D program and we've ironed out all the problems, I can take all nine of the medications I need – for the very first time. I was never able to do that before under Medicaid. I also know – for a fact – that I couldn't have handled all this without Sharon's help.

But what about the seniors? What happens to people who don't have the help I had? I hope that you will give them the assistance they need. I think Daisy feels the same way.

Thanks for having me here. I'll answer your questions as best as I can.