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## **2nd phase of in-home program not funded** Deficit threatens Medicaid transfer

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The state budget deficit appears to have temporarily wiped out a home care program that by one estimate could save taxpayers \$600 million a year.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell's proposed budget delays the launch of Money Follows the Person II by two years, to 2012. The program, created by Southbury resident Joseph Stango, is not mentioned in alternative budget proposals put forth by Republican or Democratic lawmakers.

Stango does not understand why the state would delay a program that a University of Connecticut study estimated could save taxpayers \$600 million a year when fully implemented. The legislation, signed last June by Rell, would offer Medicaid home-care benefits to people without first requiring a sixmonth stay in a nursing home.

The program would cost the state \$165,000 in 2010, and Stango thinks that's why it has been scuttled.

"My guess is they are taking every increase of \$1 or more off the table," he said. "In a time when we are lost for revenue, we should not be stepping back from this. We should be pushing forward."

Because it costs less to care for a person at home, the state would see savings as early as 2011, when an estimated \$4.8 million would be saved, according to a state Department of Social Services study.

The UConn study showed home care costs Medicaid less than nursing home care. It found that 51 percent of state Medicaid recipients in 2005 were living at home and accounted for just 31.5 percent of the state's Medicaid budget, or \$702 million. The other 49 percent accounted for 68.7 percent of the Medicaid budget, or \$1.5 billion.

Money Follows the Person II differs from a similar program by the same name that requires a person to live in a nursing home for six months before being

moved home. The state has already begun to move some people home under the original program; the plan was for 70 people to be transferred this fiscal year.

A delay in Money Follows the Person II means the family of Naugatuck resident and former Republican-American Managing Editor Bob Veillette, Stango's partner in the Medicaid reform movement, will continue to have to shoulder the financial burden of home health care.

Veillette, 63, was the inspiration for Money Follows the Person II. He suffered a massive brain-stem stroke in April 2006 that left him with locked-in syndrome, a condition that leaves a person paralyzed below the eyes but totally cognizant of the world around him.

Veillette has lived at home with his wife, Bonnie, since October 2006. Medicaid would have paid for all of Veillette's care in a nursing home but it offers him limited financial assistance at home, where he would prefer to be. Because he is not in a nursing home, he does not qualify for the original Money Follows the Person program.

Stango said people have to look beyond money and decide how to treat elderly and disabled people who want to live at home. He began to advocate for Medicaid reform in 2006 when he tried to bring his 83-year-old mother, Dora, home from a skilled nursing facility. He learned that because his mother's care was paid for by Medicaid, her benefits would not "follow" her home.

Unable to afford the cost of caring for his mother at home, he left her in a nursing facility. When she became gravely ill in December 2007, he brought her home to Southbury, where she died six days later.

"The bigger issue here is the issue of freedom for many of Connecticut's residents," he said. "Do we as a society really want to say to them, 'Thank you for all you have done, now it's time to go away?' That's essentially what we're doing."

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