

WE MATTER



Help Support Maryland Retirees keep their Prescription Drug Coverage!

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THE RIGHT TO STAND

Ken Fitch and the Facebook WE MATTER group attended the Senior Center in Reisterstown today at 11:00am. Present was Delegate Adrienne Jones, Delegate Benjamin Brooks, Attorney General Frosh, a representative from AARP and the CEO from Maryland Citizens Health Initiative Vincent DeMarco. Around 100 or more people were in attendance.

The meeting began with the speakers above indicating that they were not going to discuss the state retiree drug coverage. The speakers said that could be discussed later. Well they were wrong. It was discussed at this meeting- at length. Initially the room was told that each of the speakers were aware of the increased costs of drug prescriptions and invited everyone to follow a link to share their story. They begged the attendees in the room to let the speakers know how they felt. That is when Mr. Fitch stood up and said that he personally has contacted every legislator, every lawmaker, especially the ones present several times and” has not heard from anyone of you here in this room. In a profound moment, Mr. Fitch stated, “I don’t hear nothing. It’s quiet. You didn’t respond.” The room became silent and you could hear a pin drop as the delegates looked everywhere but at the crowd. Mr. Fitch repeated, “I don’t hear you. Why haven’t you gotten back to me or the countless other people who this is happening to? Why are you so quiet? I don’t hear nothing.” Mr. Fitch turned to the room stating, “Stand up if you worked for the State.” One third of the room stood. The meeting took off from there.

In an effort to quiet the crowd, Delegate Jones, who will be the new chair of the Finance Committee in the House approached the podium and said that we all must join together to make a concerted effort to wage war on the pharmaceuticals to reduce the cost of medication. Delegate Jones was then asked why she supported putting State Retirees in that position were they also had to deal with the increased cost of drug medication. It was then Delegate Jones said that she did not know what she was voting for. In response Delegate Jones was confronted with the 16% raise that the legislature voted in for themselves. The Delegate said that she did not vote in a raise and no more was heard from her for the rest of the meeting.

A Senior Citizen raised his hand, his voice was soft and strained. He was asked to stand. He had a statement and a question, “Your plans to combat the pharmaceutical companies are long term and I will support them. However, state retirees need immediate solutions. Well you might not have realized what you voted for, but can you pledge to us right now that you will support our efforts, introduce new legislation to correct this? Yes or No?” The response he received from the speakers did not give any answer, it was ambiguous. “Answer yes or no”, he demanded, and the crowd began to applaud. No reply was made that answered the question. Mr. DeMarco got very irritated with this

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senior citizen and told him abruptly to sit down and shut up from the podium. This generated a hiss and murmur of disapproval from the crowd. This did not deter Mr. DeMarco, who began advancing on the senior citizen yelling ‘Sit Down, I told you to sit down.’ The senior citizen, leaning on the table for support was shocked at the callousness and menacing intimidation being directed at him. He looked around for support. Mr. Fitch stood up. ‘He has the right to stand and I will stand with him. Try to tell me to sit down.’ Mr. Fitch looked at the senior citizen and said, ‘I stand with you. Say what you want to say.’ This stopped Mr. DeMarco in his tracks as people began to rally around the senior citizen, who asked one final time, ‘Yes or No?’ Delegate Brooks stepped up to the podium and said, ‘my answer to your question is YES!’ to the applause of the room. It was a powerful moment for the **WE MATTER** cause and for those who were unable to attend you really missed something.

The meeting closed with Mr. Alan Rivkin, another WE MATTER member, stating that State Retirees received no notification of this change made seven years ago. He indicated that his wife worked in HR for the State and just retired in January of 2018. The loss of drug coverage was never discussed (remember the letter came out in May of 2018 and the law was passed in 2011). He said that the legislature had a duty to inform current state employees of this issue and asked that they do so. How generous of Mr. Rivkin to express this concern for others amid his struggle. Mr. Fitch spoke with each delegate and was asked to help coordinate busses to the Rally #1 to Annapolis. How this has grown! Mr. Fitch started with a simple idea for a rally, was forwarded a date for a meeting at the Senate building for this issue and printed a flyer. Now Delegates are coordinating busses to go to Annapolis on September 13th! Busses should be departing from Reisterstown and Owings Mills. If you live in that area we will be updating, you with more information.

Every day we inch a little closer to our goal. Every day we convert one more lawmaker to the cause. Today we made a difference with two. We showed them that WE MATTER.

Deborah Hill

