



Select Committee on Aging  
Public Hearing  
February 22, 2007

Good morning, Senator Doyle, Representative Serra, Senator Caligiuri, Representative Floren, and other distinguished members of the Select Committee on Aging. My name is Bill Eddy and I am a member of the Commission on Aging, an independent agency within state government advocating for older adults of today and tomorrow. With me is Jennifer Leonard, an intern with the Commission. We are speaking on behalf of Julia Evans Starr the Executive Director. We would like to start by thanking you for your efforts this session to introduce bills which seek to enhance the quality of life for Connecticut's older adults and their families.

The Commission supports several of the bills before you. However, in an effort to focus our energy we are testifying today in support of two bills that deal with enhanced communications and information for older adults, SB 116, and critical assistance in leading a quality life HB 7132.

**SB 116, An Act Concerning Oversight of Assisted Living Residences by the Department of Public Health**

This bill proposes significant changes to assisted living facilities in an effort to safeguard the increasingly frail population of people residing in assisted living. We applaud your commitment. Before commenting on all of the components of the bill, we are awaiting the results of the recommendations of Department of Public Health Workgroup, the results of a state by state analysis (by national AARP), and further review by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to determine how further regulations in Connecticut will impact utilizing assisted living as an option under Money Follows the Person.

At this point we would like to express our strong support of Section (5) which addresses the Bill of Rights and the posting of information on the LTC Ombudsman and the Department of Public Health.

We urge your support of this most important outreach requirement. Clearly, understanding your rights as a resident should be standard operating procedure.

In 2004, the services of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman were expanded to include assisted living and managed residential communities, in addition to nursing homes. Three years later, people residing in assisted living and managed residential communities still need to know that they can call upon the Ombudsman for help.

Greater access to information about the Office of the Long-term Care Ombudsman, including contact information, is key. This information needs to be readily available and visible.

The Commission on Aging has received a number of calls from residents, caregivers, and even staff of assisted living facilities dealing with resident's rights, complaints or just general information. We refer these calls to the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman and/or the Department of Public Health.

**HB 7132, An Act Concerning the Availability of Hearing Aids for Elderly Persons.**

I would like to voice the Commission's support for raised bill number 7132, which would establish a program to provide financial assistance to elderly persons who require the use of hearing aids.

A hearing loss clearly hinders day to day functioning. It limits a person's ability to interact socially with family and friends and to receive and interpret information. Many warning devices such as fire alarms rely on sound signals. Furthermore, hearing is an important method of identifying dangers in the environment, such as approaching vehicles. Thus, hearing impairment can affect personal safety. It can also interfere with important activities of daily living, including shopping; using public transportation; and communicating with health care professionals and community service providers. When a hearing impairment limits a person's ability to function independently, it can result in a need for formal and informal long-term care services.

The National Center on Hearing Assessment and Management reports that the vast majority of Americans with a hearing loss can be successfully treated with hearing aids. Among those 65 and older, hearing loss is the third most prevalent treatable disabling condition. Up to 80% of the hearing-loss population can improve their condition by being fitted with hearing aids (reports the National Center of Health Statistics). The fact that the condition is high in prevalence and amenable to treatment, should suggest that this condition be a priority for care and funding.

For those who are able to access assistive devices such as hearing aids, the National Council on the Aging found that they were more likely to retain their independence. Use of the assistive devices will allow for individuals to maintain that independent lifestyle they desire and deserve.

Similar bills looking at the need to improve access to hearing aids have been of great debate in the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. They are grappling with issues around policies and programs that currently limit access to hearing aids due to age restrictions. For example many of the bills mandate insurance policies to provide coverage for hearing aids to children under the age of twelve.

As we asked of the Insurance Committee - we urge you to make this program available to older adults as well as people of all ages in need.