



**Human Services Committee
Public Hearing
February 20, 2007**

Testimony of the CT Commission on Aging

Good morning Chairman Harris, Chairman Villano, Senator Kissel, Representative Gibbons, and other distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Julia Evans Starr and I'm the Executive Director of the CT Commission on Aging, an independent office within state government which advocates for older adults of today and tomorrow. I also co-chair the Long-Term Care Advisory Council with Representative Villano and most gratefully with the active involvement and interest of many of you.

The Commission and Long-Term Care Advisory Council believe that the present long term care system in Connecticut is out-of-balance and in order to have real choice for older adults and persons with disabilities in Connecticut there needs to be a stronger and more fluid infrastructure of home and community based services and supports. Among other things, critical to achieving this goal is better coordination of information and communication, recognition and support of families, and a simplified means to access services and supports.

HB 6893, An Act Requiring that the Department of Social Services Establish a Communications and Outreach Program on Long-term Care and the Medicare Part D Program. ~ CoA Supports

Individuals often do not seek information about long-term care until they are in a crisis situation and need immediate help. At that point it is difficult to navigate the complex system to get needed information so that supports can be secured quickly... Often this lack of information leads individuals to assume that institutional placements are their only option. (LTC Plan 2007 – see attached section entitled “Access to Information and Services”)

Even for those who are not in the midst of crisis when exploring services and supports, confusion abounds as a result of varied (and often random) program eligibility requirements, inconsistent geographic service areas among programs, and widespread misconceptions about coverage under various payment sources.

This bill references the LTC Website. Proudly, in the fall of 2006, we (the Commission on Aging, the LTC Advisory Council, the Office of Policy and Management, and Infoline) launched this website. This one of a kind site helps people navigate the complex and expansive long-term care services and supports and it features Infoline's extensive database. Though we haven't had the resources to sufficiently market the site (yet), the thousands of people who have visited this site (roughly 150 visits and 450 hits per day) underscore the need for such resources.

www.ct.gov/longtermcare

Additionally, the Commission recommends that this bill reference the CHOICES Program as the focal point of activity. Connecticut's program for **Health Insurance Assistance, Outreach, Information & Assistance, Counseling, and Eligibility Screening (CHOICES)** is a multi-faceted and collaborative initiative among the five Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging, the Department of Social Services - Aging Services Division, the Center for Medicare Advocacy and numerous community partners, including senior centers, and an expansive team of trained volunteers.

CHOICES:

- connects older adults and their caregivers with unbiased and comprehensive information on a broad range of topics including Medicare, Medicare supplement insurance, Medicaid, Connecticut Partnership for Long Term Care policies, entitlements and community-based services (transportation, housing options...);
- empowers older adults to make informed decisions about their finances, their health care coverage, their health and well-being and their living situations;
- ensures that elderly services professionals have a reliable and current source of training and materials to help them optimally serve their clients.
- **experienced a dramatic increase in volume of activity** due to the relatively new Medicare Part D Program, the growing complexity of service delivery system, and responding to the emerging long-term care needs of younger individuals with disabilities.

In 2006 alone, the Connecticut CHOICES program:

- helped over **60,000** individuals and caregivers to navigate the Medicare Part D benefit; and
- sponsored almost **900** outreach presentations and events.

- **faces financial hardships.** Presently, CHOICES operates with exclusive reliance on federal funds (Older American Act dollars and an expiring grant from CMS). DSS allocated State Pharmacy Assistance Program (SPAP) funds, received from CMS, in support of additional staff, outreach materials, advertising and other costs to help people make meaningful initial enrollment and re-enrollment choices specific to Medicare Part D. This grant is expiring, though the demands remain.

The CoA recommends that this outreach initiative explore the federal Long-Term Care Outreach and Awareness Project. The Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (office of Disability, Aging, and Long-Term Care Policy) has a demonstration project with states to increase consumers' awareness of the need of long-term care and financial planning. Many people today do not think about their future long-term care needs and therefore fail to plan appropriately. If people were more aware of their potential need for long-term care, they are more likely to take steps to prepare for the future. From a public policy perspective, increased planning for long-term care is likely to increase private financing, and may reduce the burden on public financing sources. For these reasons, this project warrants a closer look.

In sum, this bill has the potential to streamline information, target outreach, inform consumers and their families, achieve the action steps featured in the 2007 LTC Plan, and save state dollars over time.

Thank you for this opportunity today. On behalf of the CT Commission on Aging, we wish each and every one of you a rewarding and productive year.

Attachment

Excerpt 2007 LTC Plan Submitted to the General Assembly on February 1, 2007

Developed by the LTC Planning Committee
and in collaboration with the LTC Advisory Council

(see page 87)

7. Access to Information and Services

Individuals often do not seek information about long-term care until they are in a crisis situation and need immediate help. At that point it is difficult to navigate the complex system to get needed information so that supports can be secured quickly... Often this lack of information leads individuals to assume that institutional placements are their only option.

The State has a number of sources for information on long-term care services and supports:

- Infoline (2-1-1) provides a single statewide information resource about all types of social services and programs serving people of all ages.
- The Long-Term Care Services and Supports Website provides easy access to comprehensive information on private and public long-term care (LTC) services and supports in Connecticut, including home care, community care, housing and institutional/nursing home care (www.ct.gov/longtermcare).
- The Department of Social Services Aging Services Division will continue to enhance and expand its ListServ (e-mail list) of aging network professionals who receive up-to-date information about aging services and training available. In addition, Aging Services will build on its new website to ensure that information about long-term care services and supports is current and that the link to the Long-Term Care Services and Supports Website is easily accessible (www.ct.gov/agingservices).
- The CHOICES Program provides a resource for individuals requesting information regarding Medicare, Medicare Part D, Medicare Supplemental Insurance, Medicaid and long-term care insurance.
- The Department of Social Services distributes booklets that provide comprehensive information about long-term care services and supports.
- Through the Nursing Facility Transition project, materials have been developed to inform nursing facility residents and their families about long-term care alternatives.
- The Departments of Mental Retardation, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Children and Families provide information on the programs and supports they provide and fund.
- Municipal agents in each town and city provide a valuable resource to seniors and individuals with disabilities.
- The five Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging serving elders and five Independent Living Centers serving people with disabilities provide toll-free phone numbers and information and assistance programs for their respective audiences.

Despite the availability of these resources, access to information, resources and options regarding long-term care is still elusive for many people looking for information.

Action Steps

- Over time, provide maintenance and ongoing updating of the Long-Term Care Services and Supports Website, which was finalized and released to the public in the fall of 2006. The website provides accessible information to all individuals in need of long-term care services and supports, regardless of age or disability.
- Explore the development of long-term care information resources for those consumers without Internet access.
- Over the next biennium and over time, distribute the *Nursing Facility Transition Project Handbook* to all present and future Nursing Facility residents.
- Over the next biennium and over time, distribute the *DMR Consumer and Family Guide to the DMR Home and Community-based Services Waivers* and *Understanding the DMR Home and Community-based Waivers: An Introduction to Your Hiring Choices Guide* to all present and future DMR consumers.
- Expand existing information and referral resources in order to establish and evaluate a Nursing Facility Transition Project hotline that will serve as an information resource for those interested in transitioning to the community.
- Initiate public/private partnerships to enhance public education regarding all aspects of the long-term care system in Connecticut. This should be done, in part, by building upon existing resources such as CHOICES and Infoline. Include business, government, legislative, and faith-based organizations, and community as well as consumer partners in this campaign to recognize strengths and needs of all individuals and families, to attract more workers to the health care arena, and to increase community concern and commitment to change.
- Support specific programs to disseminate information about transportation resources to both users and human service providers. Tools such as websites, the “Getting on Board” brochures used by case workers facilitating access to jobs for people with disabilities, and Infoline are resources for individuals to access information about transportation services available in their region.