



Advocating for Older Adults of Today and Tomorrow

Testimony of

Julia Evans Starr, Executive Director
Connecticut Commission on Aging

Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2009

RE: Governor Rell's Proposed FY 2010-2011 budget

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on Governor Rell's proposed budget for the Connecticut Commission on Aging for FY 2010-2011. **I ask you to reject Governor Rell's call to eliminate the Connecticut Commission on Aging.**

CoA's work – as an independent, non-partisan state advocate - is not duplicated within either present or proposed offices of the Executive or Legislative branches of government.

In recognition of the daunting task before you in preparing a thoughtful budget - we, at the Commission on Aging, offer ourselves as a critical piece of the solution! Connecticut is one of the nation's oldest states and demographics indicate that our population of older adults is set to explode in the next twenty years. As our older population grows, so too do the state funds necessary to meet their needs.

As a non-partisan, independent resource located in the legislative branch – we help the Legislature and others meet these challenges, prioritize funding and plan for our state's future.

Overall CoA Budget:

The Commission on Aging's current budget is about \$460,000 (0.0025% of the entire state budget). This number reflects rescissions and cuts that have been made since passage of the FY '09 budget in June of 2007.

These funds go primarily (about 80%) towards Personal Services for our staff of four, including myself. Therefore, any discussion of elimination of the CoA would only save the state money – and a relatively small amount - through employee layoffs.

You will note that the Governor's proposal indicates that the Commission has five staff members. Although the Legislature kindly appropriated funds for our office to hire a fifth staff member in the current fiscal year, given the fiscal climate, we did not fill that position. It should be noted that we had planned for this fifth staff person not to "bloat government bureaucracy" but to identify and secure outside funding sources for aging-related initiatives.

Additionally, to use extreme caution utilizing state spending, the CoA has budgeted to return an additional 5% in Operating Expenditures (OE) this year.

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CoA: A Highly Efficient State Agency

To accomplish our work with maximum efficiency, we have always pursued creative means to achieve our results. For example, we have associations with the UConn School of Social Work and UConn Law School, and have enlisted high-quality, unpaid interns and research volunteers to assist us. We also have a 17-member volunteer citizen board, whose time, energy and efforts make connections to communities across the state. Our many stakeholder partners across the state collaborate with us to streamline and improve state government and its services.

We also think creatively to meet our goals. For example, one of our projects is the state's legislatively-mandated Long-Term Care web site. We created, manage and maintain this site within existing resources and the help of our state agency partners. We have utilized a number of low-cost, but effective methods to promote the web site, with churches, synagogues and community centers across the state (even hair salons!); geriatricians and other physicians; and, the inclusion of web site information in over 100,000 state employee and retiree paystubs.

Another CoA initiative addresses the economic security of older adults, while also mitigating looming workforce shortages. Our "Redefining Retirement Years" initiative involved statewide focus groups and national research and resulted in a series of published reports, utilizing in-house staff and volunteers. Our latest report on this issue resulted in policy options that could save the state millions of dollars annually by providing more flexible work opportunities for its older workers.

CoA: Accountable to the General Assembly and the People of Connecticut

This year we embraced Results Based Accountability and look forward to working with the Committee on this new and most worthwhile initiative. Any objective assessment of CoA's performance will reveal a low-cost, highly efficient and effective independent agency that delivers a sound investment in Connecticut's future.

CoA also has an oversight role within state government. For example, one of our legislative mandates is to review and comment on state budgets, policies and procedures that affect older adults, providing accountability and an independent voice that is not found elsewhere in or out of state government.

CoA also provides critical leadership in the area of long-term care services and supports, which represent over \$2 billion, or 14%, of the state budget. Using research and recommendations from the state's Long-Term Care Needs Assessment, CoA has developed policy proposals that could save Connecticut taxpayers \$600 million each year. These proposals also increase choice in how and where people receive care, thereby increasing quality of life.

As part of this leadership, CoA co-chairs the legislatively-mandated Long-Term Care Advisory Council, a remarkable collaboration of providers, consumers and advocates for older adults and persons with disabilities. The Advisory Council works collaboratively towards more efficient state government, helping to design systems that eliminate overlap and duplication. This approach represents national trends and best practices; combining programming benefits both constituencies and streamlines government.

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed to ensure a continued commitment to services and supports for individuals in need. The Connecticut Commission on Aging must be preserved to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services. Our demonstrated leadership and responsible financial management will serve the state well in the months and years ahead.