

Testimony of

Connecticut Commission on Aging

*House Bill 6674: An Act Concerning Workforce Development
and Improved Access to Health Care Services*

Public Health Committee

March 16, 2009

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this critical piece of legislation before you today.

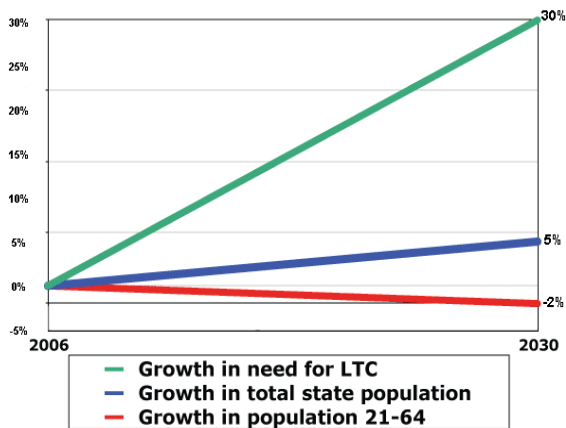
As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is the independent state agency solely devoted to enhancing the lives of the present and future generations of our state's older adults. For fifteen years, the Commission has served as an effective leader in statewide efforts to promote choice, independence and dignity for Connecticut's older adults and persons with disabilities.

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed and provided by the Connecticut Commission on Aging. We pledge to continue to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping its commitments to critical programs and services.

House Bill 6674: An Act Concerning Workforce Development and Improved Access to Health Care Services

~CoA Supports

This bill creates a multi-agency initiative to address the state's health care workforce shortage. The Connecticut Commission on Aging supports this effort to address a major challenge in the movement to provide choice and quality in long-term care services and supports. To help support the "rebalancing" movement towards providing more care in homes and communities, we would recommend that this committee expand the legislation to include home care workers.



The statewide Long-Term Care Needs Assessment, completed by the UConn Health Center, Center on Aging in 2007, identified workforce shortages as a very real and growing problem for Connecticut. Although Connecticut's population is expected to remain fairly stable over the next twenty years, the need for long-term care by people of all ages is expected to grow by 30% by 2030. At the same time, the population of Connecticut residents aged 21-64 (generally, the working population) is actually expected to decrease by 2% during that same time.



As a result of this rapidly growing need, the Needs Assessment projects significant increases in the need for home and health care workers in Connecticut. For example:

Occupation	Projected Growth in CT between 2004 and 2014
Home health aides	25% increase
Physical therapists	26% increase
Personal and home care aides	28% increase
Registered nurses	13% increase
Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	16% increase

As illustrated above, home and health care workers represent a considerable opportunity for job creation for our state in the next several years. Indeed, nationally, home care workers are the fastest growing occupational need. However, particularly for home care workers, low wages and benefits, as well as negative perceptions of working conditions, are obstacles to attracting new workers to the field and retaining current workers.

Policymakers in Connecticut have shown a commitment to addressing this issue over the past several years, particularly in reference to the need for nurses. However, individual programs, such as nursing faculty incentives, easing state licensure for existing nurses and online registration, have not been coordinated to date.

In order to enhance synergy and reduce duplication of efforts, we recommend that an inventory of existing recruitment, training, retention and career ladder programs and initiatives be created. Additionally, a web-based clearinghouse would provide one location for individuals to access information on all related local, state and federal programs and initiatives. This inventory and clearinghouse were top recommendations of a recent statewide summit on workforce issues, conducted by the Connecticut Commission on Aging and the Steering Committee for the statewide Money Follows the Person project. At that summit, over seventy home care providers, caregivers and representatives from nursing schools, hospitals and other stakeholders provided input and ideas on how to address the direct care workforce shortage. We would be happy to share the other recommendations of this summit with you.

Again, we ask for your support of this legislation. We have the following recommendations for your consideration:

- 1) expand the bill to include home care workers, as well as health care workers;
- 2) include a directive to inventory existing programs; and,
- 3) create a web-based clearinghouse to inform employers, educators and the public about available programs.

The Connecticut Commission on Aging is happy to work with this Committee on this legislation moving forward. Thank you.