



Advocating for Older Adults of Today and Tomorrow

Testimony of

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Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee

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Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to comment on *Senate Bill 752* and *Senate Bill 753*, concerning the recommendations of the Committee in regards to assessing and planning for the needs of aging individuals with developmental disabilities.

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.

As one of our many community and state-agency partnerships, the Commission serves as a member of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Aging Focus Team. The Commission also co-chairs the legislatively-mandated Long-Term Care Advisory Council with Representative Peter Villano.

Currently, DDS serves over 5000 clients over the age of 45; almost 900 of these clients live with family members who serve as informal caregivers, many of whom are over the age of 65 themselves. It is important to note that people with intellectual disabilities can age prematurely and therefore tend to develop age-related health conditions at a much younger age. We are pleased to recognize that DDS bases its services on need/functionality (and not specific age) which is a progressive model of service delivery worthy of emulation statewide.

Senate Bill 752
~CoA Supports

SB 752 focuses on the needs of aging individuals with developmental disabilities. Section 1 requires better coordination of nursing home care between DDS and the state Department of Public Health and takes steps to ensure that the appropriate level of care is provided to DDS clients. The Connecticut Commission on Aging supports this and all coordination efforts as well as oversight of quality of care.

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Section 2 of the bill concerns Southbury Training School. As you know, approximately 500 residents remain at Southbury, though no new admissions have occurred recently. Many believe that Southbury clients would be better-served in their own communities; state costs might also decrease. A comprehensive study of the facility, including opportunity for public input, would help the state progress toward final resolution of this long-running political and philosophical debate.

The cost review detailed in Section 3 might provide additional fiscal support for home and community-based care, which the Commission on Aging supports. However, it should be noted that enhanced quality of life is not included in the review.

SB 753

~CoA Supports

This bill also addresses the potential closure of Southbury Training School. It is our understanding that current state law (CGS §17a-451d) dictates that all money obtained from the sale of Southbury Training School go towards services for persons with developmental or psychiatric disabilities. This proposal would specify that the funds would go towards the DDS wait list. This initiative makes sense, particularly because wait list funding is now in jeopardy (see Background).

In addition, as the DDS client population ages, so do their caregivers. **Therefore, though neither bill addresses this issue, the Commission strongly recommends enhanced caregiver outreach and training.** This addition would be most consistent with a recommendation of the state's Long-Term Care Needs Assessment: "*Caregivers should be a target group for education about long-term care services availability and financing.*" The DDS client population's caregivers are an especially important target group because they are planning for both themselves and their adult children. It is our understanding that DDS has begun these initiatives already; continued funding and support are, of course, essential.

Background

The Connecticut General Assembly and the Governor established a five-year wait list initiative in 2004. Through this initiative, enhanced family support services have provided stop-gap services to both clients and their caregivers, allowing many clients the opportunity to remain in their homes and communities, instead of in institutions. Unlike most state-administered programs, which typically operate on a first-come/first-serve basis, these services were targeted towards those most in need; clients with caregivers over the age of 65 were among the prioritized group.

Approximately 400 family caregivers have received priority support through this funding and almost 200 additional clients with caregivers over the age of 65 remain on the waiting list. **Unfortunately, this initiative and its funding are expected to end this year.** In this difficult fiscal climate, it is important to note that if this funding ends, then these at-risk consumers are likely to be institutionalized. Institutionalization removes choice and dignity and costs the state more money.

The Commission on Aging has a longstanding priority to enhance choice in how and where people live as they age. In fact, CGS §17b-337 reinforces a statewide commitment by asserting that the state's long-term care policies and plan "shall provide that individuals with long-term care needs have the option to choose and receive long-term care and support in the least restrictive, appropriate setting."

The Commission is grateful for the renewed commitment to aging services at the Department of Developmental Services. DDS revitalized the Aging Focus Team this past year and filled an Aging Coordinator position in February of this year: Siobhan Morgan has brought her energy and

expertise to both the Department's initiatives as well as across-agency initiatives, e.g., Money Follows the Person, Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) and Connect-Ability. She also serves as an active and engaged ex officio member of the CT Commission on Aging.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment today and for tackling this important issue. 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 stands ready to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services.

As always, please contact us with any questions about this issue or other aging-related issues. It's our pleasure to serve as an objective, nonpartisan resource to you.