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Testimony of

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*American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: Weatherization Assistance Program
Proposed Connecticut State Plan*

Appropriations and Energy and Technology Committees

May 4, 2009

Thank you for this opportunity to comment today on the proposed state plan for the use of \$64.3 million in federal funding for weatherization.

As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is an independent, nonpartisan state agency that is part of the legislative branch of government. We are devoted to preparing our state for a burgeoning aging population while promoting policies that enhance the lives of the present and future generations of older adults. For over 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. The Commission also serves as a member of the statutorily-mandated Low-Income Energy Advisory Board (CGS §16a-41b).

As part of Results-Based Accountability, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is working toward the following Population Result: "All present and future older adults in Connecticut live in the secure, healthy and productive environment of their choice." A major component of this goal is being able to afford to live in one's home, and energy costs are an ongoing struggle. Programs like the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Operation Fuel have helped hundreds of thousands of older adults meet this need.

These new weatherization funds can help our state better meet the challenge of providing energy assistance to low-income households, while decreasing our overall state energy needs and creating jobs. Thoughtful consideration of this federal investment in Connecticut provides an opportunity for policymakers to coordinate funding streams and programs and maximize the usage of these funds.

The Commission on Aging commends the Department of Social Services for constructing this Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) proposal which could weatherize more than 30,000 dwellings in which older adults reside. We have the following comments for the Committees' consideration:

1) The Commission is pleased to see that DSS plans to utilize a single application process to establish eligibility for all energy assistance programs administered by that Department. This can help maximize all energy funds coming into Connecticut by ensuring that individuals receiving assistance paying their energy bills live in energy-efficient homes.

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2) Connecticut could get more “bang for our buck” by prioritizing homes with high energy usage, as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania plans to do.

3) Connecticut should include refrigerator replacement in our weatherization plans, which is allowable under federal law and can have enormous impacts on overall household energy costs. Although this improvement is not prohibited by this WAP proposal, it is not specifically listed as a possible measure in Section VI of the proposal. Old refrigerators can be one of the biggest culprits in energy inefficiency.

4) The State of New York contracts for bulk purchase of weatherization materials, such as insulation and furnaces. Setting up a similar system in Connecticut would help maximize the amount of work that could be completed on each home.

5) The Commission is pleased that DSS envisions working with several partners on the job creation piece of WAP, including the Institute for Sustainable Energy, the Workforce Investment Boards and the community colleges. We recommend creating an inventory of all existing and planned job training efforts in Connecticut related to energy and ensuring synergy and coordination among programs.

- For example, Executive Order 23 establishes the Green Collar Jobs Council and 21st Century Green Jobs Training Initiative. Governor Rell’s Order also directs the Community College System to utilize \$2 million in federal Department of Labor funding to establish new certificate credit programs for sustainable and renewable energy (Sustainable Operations: Alternative and Renewable Energy (SOAR)).
- Additionally, separate adult employment and training activities are funded through ARRA under the Workforce Investment Act piece.
- Senate Bill 633 recommends that the State Departments of Education and Higher Education establish a mentoring and job training program for minority males.

6) Connecticut has shown an enormous commitment to energy efficiency and assistance programming over the past several years and has earned national recognition for its efforts (e.g., CT ranked first in the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy 2006 scorecard). The result, unfortunately, is a complicated and fragmented set of programs run by multiple state agencies, including DSS, OPM and DECD, as well as utility companies. For example, OPM runs both a furnace replacement rebate program and a furnace upgrade rebate program; weatherization for low-income individuals is run by DSS; energy conservation loans are available for homeowners through DECD. Again, we recommend creating an inventory of these programs and ensuring synergy and coordination among programs. This inventory could better serve consumers and help reduce duplication in state government, all the while ensuring maximization of state and federal funds. Additionally, Connecticut should strongly consider the recommendations of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee regarding low-income energy assistance, including changing application requirements from annually to once every three years.

7) Finally, the Commission is pleased that this plan addresses the health and safety of residents during weatherization efforts, including requiring US Department of Energy Minimum Standards for Lead Safe Weatherization. We recommend coordinating funding streams with other home safety and improvement programs, such as lead poisoning prevention.

We would be most pleased to work with these Committees and the administration on this plan moving forward. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Commission office, at (860) 240-5200. Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this important issue.