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TOWN OF NEWINGTON

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Senior and Disabled Center



Dianne Stone
Director

Testimony presented to the Public Health Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
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Dear Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding S.B. 1226, An Act Establishing A Fall Prevention Program. I testify in support of this very important Bill.

My name is Dianne Stone and I am the Director of the Newington Senior and Disabled Center which is the first of seven (7) Connecticut Senior Centers to be Nationally Accredited. I am also the current president of the Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel and the Connecticut Association of Municipal Agents for the Elderly. On a National level, I am a delegate to the National Institute of Senior Centers, a certified peer reviewer and standard trainer and the co-chair of the National Accreditation Board. I tell you this not to self aggrandize but to hopefully demonstrate my commitment to the development of programs and services, at a local level, for older adults.

I recently attended the annual American Society on Aging and National Council on Aging Joint Conference, the largest aging conference in the nation. One of the strongest themes running through this event was an imperative for evidence based health programs delivered at a local level. The Administration on Aging, National Council on Aging, Center for Medicare Services and CDC are all engaged in the development and promulgation of programs that are proven to reduce the risk of disease, injury and disability. Fall prevention ranks high on this list. I am not going to spend time talking about incidence rates, morbidity, costs, etc. This is not my area of expertise. You will hear from those experts. I want to tell you about our experience with fall prevention.

Falls are the most common accident that we see in our centers. We have seen, too many times, participants whose ability to be fully engaged in the community and to live independently cut short by the effects of a fall. The consequence of a fall can be devastating. That is why we were incredibly pleased to collaborate with Yale University and UConn Health Center on a three year project funded by the Administration on Aging called "Step by Step". Through this project, we

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First in State of Connecticut
Fully Accredited by the National Institute of Senior Centers

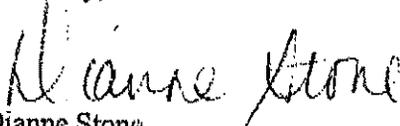
were able to offer the interventions that were developed at Yale to members of our senior center. I can attest to the fact that our participants responded. They came in for assessments, listened to the advice that they were given and followed the recommendations. By their own reports, they felt less at risk. The research bears this out.

As has been recognized, Senior Centers are a logical venue for health promotion, including fall prevention, because our participants tend to be well and not in crisis. As such, they are willing to try something new and can hear and act on prevention messages. More importantly, Senior Centers are where older people are. Through the "Step by Step" program and pilot funding from DSS, there are now 10 senior centers that are offering evidence based fall prevention programming. Through the collaboration with Yale and UConn, we now have a system for helping people identify and reduce their risks and a system for helping people who do fall in the hope that it will not happen again. We are making a real difference.

In the race to develop and implement evidence based programming, we need to recognize Connecticut's unique advantage in the area of fall prevention. With over 15 years of private and federal funding, extensive experience and momentum has been built. It is time for Connecticut to make funds available to leverage this experience so that fall prevention can be implemented in Senior Centers across the state. The ground work has been completed. Funding fall prevention now will save money in the future. More importantly, it will preserve the dignity and independence of our residents by reducing their risk of falling.

Thank you again for this opportunity and for your consideration of funding Senate Bill 1226. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,


Dianne Stone