

TOWN OF ENFIELD

Senior Center

Testimony presented to the Public Health Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
March 14, 2007

Dear Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding Senate Bill 1226, An Act Establishing A Fall Prevention Program. As the Health & Fitness Coordinator for the Enfield Senior Center and a Clinical Exercise Specialist, I strongly support funding for SB 1226.

As the Health & Fitness Coordinator at the Enfield Senior Center, I work primarily in the fitness room where I design safe and effective exercise programs for individuals to follow using our state-of-the-art fitness equipment. I also teach small educational health & wellness workshops on a variety of topics related to older adults, fall prevention being one of them. I have direct contact with community-dwelling older adults living in Enfield and the surrounding towns. I designed the fall prevention classes through the support of the Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention and Yale University. Over the last three (3) years the Enfield Senior Center has been collaborating with CCFP, Yale University and UConn School of Medicine on a fall prevention program called "Step by Step". Before our participation in the "Step by Step" program the senior center did not have fall prevention programming. Now through this evidenced-based project the senior center has the following fall prevention programming on a regular basis: a free 5-part educational fall prevention class called "Keep Your Composure". This class is approximately 75% lecture and 25% a physical workshop. I also teach an advance or follow-up class called "Balancing Act I"; which is 75% physical conditioning and 25% educational. Most of the material I use and will continue to use is directly from the "Step by Step" program, the CCFP and Yale University. Individual fall risk assessments are also available by appointment at the Enfield Senior Center at no charge. These fall prevention programs, that are now imbedded into the senior center, have brought more people out into the community and frequenting the senior center for other activities such as the book club, the current events group, movie night, our monthly physician quest speaker, other fitness classes and the lunch program. Funding for SB 1226 would allow other senior centers to make fall prevention programming available to their members.

Being an interventionist in fall prevention, I have seen a direct positive impact on many of the members who have come in for fall risk assessments and for the classes. We especially experienced sick people getting "better" after their 4-month follow-up after the initial fall risk assessment. One man stands out in my mind; he came in because his wife saw our ad in the local newspaper offering free fall risk assessments. The nurse and I completed a thorough fall risk assessment for this man and we found that he was taking over 19 medications daily. With one visit to his physician, after the nurse's intervention, he was reduced to 11 medications and after four months down to 8. He shared with us, during his 4-month follow up re-assessment, that he felt "drunk" all day and every day. He said that not only does he feel better but he is saving a lot of money. This was a tremendous reward for us as interventionists and another reason to keep fall prevention in place. There were a few times that we had a special case where we needed back-up from the professionals at Yale University and they

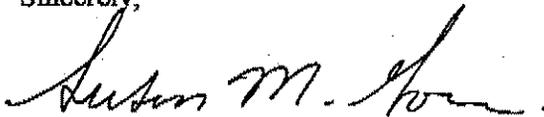
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were quick to step in to help us refer individuals to a physician in Hartford. Together, through this network of interventionist, research scientist, and physicians, our team became an invaluable tool for some individuals who did not seem to be getting the care that they needed from the medical community. The education that older adults receive from the fall prevention program is giving them the empowerment to pursue their health and decrease the risk of falling in the future.

Being a part of this fall prevention programming has increased my own interest in the academics of fall prevention and has made my work even more fulfilling since I can now help our members be safe, be healthy, stay independent, and stay in our community. With my new found education in fall prevention I now take my classes to the Manchester Senior Center and I am hoping other centers in Connecticut.

Thank you again for the honor and opportunity to tell you about my experiences and for your consideration of funding this very important SB 1226. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan M. Gouin".

Susan M. Gouin, B.S.
Health & Fitness Coordinator
Enfield Senior Center