

**Testimony before the Committee on Human Services
March 11, 2008**

**Raised Bill No 664 "An Act Concerning Independent Transportation Networks"
Town of West Hartford & Seniors Job Bank, Inc.**

INTRODUCTION

My name is Ed Dombroskas, and I am here representing the Town of West Hartford and the Seniors Job Bank – a not-for-profit organization of which I am the Executive Director.

The Town of West Hartford has become increasingly aware of the need for expanded transportation for older adults, but resources have not been readily available to address that issue. When the opportunity arose, the Town responded to the Department of Social Services' RFP and ultimately became the recipient of a grant to develop a plan for a financially self-sustaining community-based, regional transportation system for the elderly. The Town invited the Seniors Job Bank to partner with it both in applying for the original grant, and in facilitating the planning and implementation of such a transportation system in West Hartford, with possible regional expansion.

PURPOSE FOR APPEARING

The Town of West Hartford and the Seniors Job Bank supports SB 664.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE

West Hartford chose to take an analytical approach in assessing and developing the type of transportation program that would best suit older adults residing in West Hartford.

First, we reviewed our senior demographics, and assessed all existing transportation options available to older adults in West Hartford. We then determined how those systems were or were not meeting their needs.

Second, we reached out to various community groups to solicit their input. We met with the town's Senior Advisory Commission and other key service providers, including the supervisors of our two senior centers and key personnel in our Human Services Division, so that we could gain further insight into the needs of West Hartford's older adults.

Third, we engaged the services of the University of Connecticut Center for Research & Analysis to conduct a series of focus groups with driving and non-driving older adults in our community, and later launched an extensive mail survey to over 3,000 seniors aged 75 and over to get firsthand information on their needs, the likelihood of use, ability to pay, etc. (It is interesting to note that UCONN reports that this survey has produced a return rate of nearly 40% – the highest return rate of any survey they have conducted. We believe this is testament to the importance of transportation to the older adults residing in our community.)

Concurrently, we have been researching and analyzing various transportation systems throughout the country that are dedicated to servicing older adults so that we could determine best practices. We have also been reviewing literature including the recent *Connecticut Long-Term Care Needs Assessment* report commissioned by the Legislature, which indicates that transportation is the number one issue facing older adults throughout the state.

OUR NEXT STEP

We are now in the process of collecting final data and determining what type of independent transportation would best meet the current and future needs of the senior population in West Hartford. Whether it will be the franchised ITN system, or a program that builds on our existing services, is yet to be determined. Once that determination is made, we plan to schedule a series of public meetings to introduce the concept to residents. The input we receive will assist us in further refining our plan to ensure that it meets the needs of the community.

WHY SUPPORT THIS BILL

We believe that we are at a critical juncture. We have completed responsible research and analysis and we are now in the process of formulating a final plan that uniquely responds to the needs of our older residents. Funding made available through SB 664 will help us become operational and move forward from the planning stage to the implementation stage. Now is the time to make this happen, for as Connecticut's aging population continues to increase, the issue of independent transportation will become even larger.

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