



Advocating for Older Adults of Today and Tomorrow

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Testimony of

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Select Committee on Aging

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Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to comment on a number of bills before you today.

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. I'd like to thank this committee for its ongoing leadership and collaboration in these efforts.

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.

SB 451: An Act Establishing a Silver Alert System

The Commission supports the concept of this bill to help identify and locate older adults who have been reported missing. Thirteen other states have "Silver Alert" systems for this purpose, similar to the Amber Alert system for missing children.

However, we do believe that the bill should be broadened to include all individuals who are missing and may be in danger. Not only would broadening the system help all other at-risk populations (**including those under age 65 afflicted with dementia-related disorders**), but a more integrated system would be easier for residents to understand and utilize.



Missouri's system can serve as a model to Connecticut. That state's Endangered Person Advisory Program includes any and all persons who are missing under unexplained, involuntary or suspicious circumstances and who may be in danger. Alternatively, the Commission would recommend expanding Connecticut's existing Amber Alert system, creating one integrated system for missing persons of all ages.

The Commission believes that ease of use and at a minimum cost is critical to the success of this program. We would be happy to work with the Committee this session to craft this legislation.

SB 452: An Act Concerning Funding for Adult Day Care Centers

The Connecticut Commission on Aging supports this bill as a smart investment in our home- and community-based infrastructure. Adult Day Centers are a critical component to "rebalancing," a movement that seeks to keep individuals in their homes and communities whenever possible.

Connecticut's Long-Term Care Needs Assessment, completed in 2007, found that 80% of respondents wanted to remain in their homes as they age. Many are able to do so with both "formal" and "informal" care. "Formal" care includes that provided by home care providers (sometimes through public programs, such as the CT Home Care Program for Elders), nutrition, transportation, visiting nurse care and other supports.

The bulk of care, however, is provided "informally," by spouses, neighbors, children and friends. In fact, National AARP estimates that over 500,000 Nutmeggers provide informal care to at least one adult, an economic value to our state of \$4.9 billion. As rewarding as providing this care is, it is also physically and mentally exhausting.

Adult day centers provide needed respite for these informal caregivers, while also providing valuable socialization and recreation to adults with long-term care needs. Like other private providers, adult day centers rely heavily on state Medicaid dollars for their continued success. The Commission thanks the Committee for its support of adult day centers and other efforts to help provide choice, dignity and independence for older adults and persons with disabilities.

SB 455: An Act Concerning the Nursing Home Bill of Rights

The Commission on Aging supports this bill, which will protect nursing home residents and their families, by providing greater legal protection and clarifying their rights under state law.

Although existing laws provide some protection for residents, some facilities' contracts ask prospective residents to agree to reduce or, in some cases, even waive those rights. Many families make decisions about nursing home care under duress and time constraints; too often, they do not have the time and ability to read these contracts line by line. Individuals should not be forced to decide whether or not to waive their rights when faced with such difficult, life-changing decisions as those involving their own or their loved one's long-term care needs.

This bill is essential if Connecticut is to keep its commitment to quality care in nursing facilities. We ask for your support.

HB 5045: An Act Concerning the Elderly Tax Freeze Program

Last year, the Commission, with the support of this committee, completed and published a report entitled "Property Tax Relief for Older Adults: A Profile of Connecticut's Local Programs." The report inventories existing local property tax relief programs, summarizes the findings and recommends six improvements designed to move our state towards greater information sharing and education.

The Commission encourages this Committee to consider these recommendations when considering modifications to or expansions of current programs:

- Information about existing state and local programs should be included in annual property tax bills, in language that is easy to read and to understand;
- The state should collect information about property tax relief programs annually and make this information available to the public;
- Local elected officials and assessors should have access to more information to help them make decisions about property tax relief programs and options for implementing revaluation;
- Property tax relief programs should be provided in an equitable manner to low and moderate income households;
- The state should examine the possibility of combining or streamlining existing property tax relief programs to achieve efficiency and for ease of use by residents; and,
- Existing programs and their use should be considered as part of comprehensive tax reform.

The property tax relief report is available on our website, at www.cga.ct.gov/coa, and hard copies can be provided as requested. We would be happy to work with you to craft legislation that supports the recommendations of this report.

HB 5297: An Act Concerning the Status of the Money Follows the Person Project

The Commission on Aging supports this bill and all efforts to share information between branches of government and with the public.

The Money Follows the Person Demonstration Project is a critical component of rebalancing our long-term care system. This multi-pronged initiative will transition older adults and persons with disabilities from nursing homes back into the community; will divert individuals from nursing homes who might otherwise be sent there; and, in general, move our state forward in providing choice in how and where individuals receive long-term care services and supports.

The Commission believes such reporting would be beneficial to all committees of cognizance, and therefore recommends expanding the reporting to the Human Services, Public Health and Appropriations Committees as well.

Thank you for your support of these initiatives and of the work of the Connecticut Commission on Aging.

