



Advocating for Older Adults of Today and Tomorrow

Testimony of

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Connecticut Commission on Aging

Select Committee on Aging

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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.

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed and provided by the Connecticut Commission on Aging. We pledge to continue to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping its commitment to thoughtful policy and critical programs and services.

Senate Bill 16: An Act Concerning an Income Tax Deduction for Long-Term Care

~CoA Comments

The Connecticut Commission on Aging supports the general concept behind this legislation, which seeks to provide assistance to individuals who pay for their loved ones' care, by providing an income tax deduction for the cost of this care.

However, the Commission has a number of suggestions specific to this bill:

- We believe that this bill should be broadened to include the care of all individuals with long-term care needs (not just those aged seventy and up);
- We believe that the bill should include non-relatives who may also be paying for the care of their friends and neighbors; and,
- Individuals who are paying for their own care should be able to access the same deductions as others. As the current language of this bill is not clear in this intent, the Commission is concerned that family members may attempt to gain control of their relatives' finances, in order to access this tax deduction.

Additionally, the State of Connecticut's Long-Term Care Plan and the Long-Term Care Needs Assessment recommend tax breaks and incentives for "informal caregivers," including unpaid friends, neighbors and loved ones who take care of individuals with long-term care needs. According to the soon-to-be-released Elder Economic Security Initiative, there are over 380,000 unpaid caregivers in our state. In recognition of these committed individuals, the Commission believes that recognizing the needs of informal, unpaid caregivers should be an initial focus of policymakers.

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Senate Bill 245: An Act Concerning a Property Tax Credit for Home Improvements that Enable the Elderly or Disabled to Remain in their Homes

~CoA Comments

This bill allows municipalities to waive property taxes for a specific year in which a person makes a home improvement that allows older adults to stay in their homes.

The Connecticut Commission on Aging supports all efforts that allow individuals to receive care at home. After conducting an exhaustive study of local property tax programs, the Commission recommended streamlining existing local and state programs before creating new ones (see "Property Tax Relief for Older Adults: A Profile of Connecticut's Local Programs," CT Commission on Aging, 2008). Residents and town officials strongly supported streamlining programs, to achieve efficiencies and for ease of use by residents.

The Commission respectfully recommends expanding existing state programs that help homeowners with these important modifications. For example, the Connecticut Housing Financing Authority administers a loan program that helps homeowners create accessory apartments or home additions for older adults.

House Bill 5091: An Act Concerning Elderly Victims of Fraud

~CoA Comments

This bill allows Office of Victim Services to order compensation paid to certain older adults who were victims of financial fraud.

This Committee has heard compelling testimony about financial fraud perpetrated on older adults, who can at times be vulnerable to this type of crime. Though the Commission supports this laudable effort as a long-term goal, it is our understanding that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund (CICF), administered by the Office of Victim Services, currently does not have the resources to provide for this compensation.

House Bill 6540: An Act Concerning Prescription Eye Drop Refills

~CoA Supports

The Connecticut Commission on Aging supports this commonsense proposal to help individuals of all ages receive needed prescription medication. Eye drops can be difficult to administer and therefore individuals often need refills prior to the date requested by the physician. We ask for your support of this legislation moving forward.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment today and for tackling these important issues.

As always, please contact us with any questions about this issue or other aging-related issues. It's our pleasure to serve as an objective, nonpartisan resource to you.