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Written testimony of Margaret Smith Hale

**In support of the Commission on Aging as a part of
Senate Bill No. 840**

**An Act Concerning the Elimination of the Office of
Consumer Counsel, the Office of the Healthcare Advocate,
the Office of Ombudsman for Property Rights, and certain
legislative commissions.**

**Respectfully Submitted to the Government Administration
and Elections Committee
March 16, 2009**

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee in opposition to Senate Bill 840, An Act Concerning the Elimination of the Office of Consumer Counsel, the Office of the Healthcare Advocate, the Office of Ombudsman for Property Rights, and certain legislative commissions. My testimony is in support of the Commission on Aging.

ITNNorthCentralConnecticut™ is a unique community-based alternative transportation program for seniors and adults with visual impairments. This valuable service would not be in Connecticut if it had not been for the Commission on Aging.

As a part of their independent study the Commission on Aging identified the need for additional transportation options for older adults. They worked with the Human Services Committee and created start-up funding for 5 planning groups to provide community based regional transportation that would be self-sustaining.

In March of 2008 it was determined that these programs could not operate without changes in the livery laws for the State of Connecticut. The Legislative Director for the Commission on Aging, Debra Polun, took the lead and

held a meeting with Senators Harris, Kissel and DeFronzo. She followed the issue on a daily basis and on May 7, 2008 legislation was passed which fixed the problem and made it possible for all programs like ours to operate efficiently in the state. There is one starting now in Middletown and one in the planning stages in Westport. We expect that there will be more in the future.

On January 1, 2009 *ITNNorthCentralConnecticut*[™] began offering door-through-door rides 24/7 to seniors and adults with visual impairments in Bloomfield, East Granby, East Windsor, Enfield, Granby, Somers, South Windsor, Suffield, Windsor and Windsor Locks. This alternative program is the first of its kind in Connecticut. We use a combination of volunteer and paid drivers who provide rides in private vehicles. There is no restriction on the purpose of a ride, and help is offered to carry packages, fold walkers, and open doors.

ITNNorthCentralConnecticut[™] is a community-supported nonprofit that does not use public dollars for operating expenses. Volunteers are used to keep the service affordable. Fares, memberships, car donations, walks and other resources fund the operation. Our average fare is only \$9.

These services are invaluable to our growing senior population. People today outlive their ability to drive by between 6 to 10 years.

ITNNorthCentralConnecticut[™] will impact society in four areas: health, safety, relief for caregivers, and revenues to the local business community.

- Health – studies show that non-drivers make 15% fewer trips to the doctor
- Safety – drivers age 80 and older have higher crash death rates per mile driven than all but teen drivers
- Relief for caregivers – transportation is a major reason why caregivers have to leave work. A MetLife study shows that there is a \$17 billion loss in productivity in the US due to caregivers losing time from work.

- Revenues – ITNAmerica® research shows that the impact to the local community of one ITN affiliate is between \$300,000 and \$500,000 per year.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support of the Commission on Aging. Please feel free to contact me at (860)758-7833 or at MSmithHale@itnnorthcentralct.org.

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