



**March 16, 2009**

**Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing**

**Testimony of**

**Nancy S. Hodkoski, City of Torrington  
Director, Services for the Elderly  
Sullivan Senior Center  
CT Commission on Aging Member**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the impact of Governor Rell's proposal to eliminate the Commission on Aging.

Governor Rell's Budget Highlights publication, states the budget proposes to eliminate 10 offices and commissions whose functions are no longer needed or are substantially duplicated elsewhere in state government. It is my belief the CT Commission on Aging (Commission) is needed and their work is not duplicated elsewhere. Elimination will silence the voice of seniors in our state.

The Commission works independently under the Legislative Branch of Government. They are the voice for thousands of people who are on meals-on-wheel, living in nursing homes and in our communities struggling to accept the changes and loss experienced everyday due to the aging process. The Commission works for the people who cannot be here today to testify, but benefit from their diligence.

The Commission gathers information by holding Town Hall meetings throughout the State. This is a means to create a dialogue with seniors, their family, friends, neighbors, and service providers, to learn how people are managing. Whether it is a lack of transportation, their inability to pay property taxes, desire for employment opportunities, assistance to navigate the healthcare maze, or a ConnPACE issue, securing the information first hand helps the Commission provide answers on the spot, research issues of importance and accurately represent the people and their needs when testifying before the Legislature. Town Hall meetings are needed and are not duplicated elsewhere in state government.

The Commission is recognized on a national level for its world-class research work on Long Term Care, and for bringing the Earth's Elders Exhibit, not only to our State Capitol, but also to the Rotunda of the United States Capitol in Washington, DC. Their intergenerational work is cutting edge, which is substantiated through their partnership with school districts and the CT Department of Education to implement the Earth's Elders curriculum in classrooms, which teaches students about the wisdom of elders and nurtures respect and relationships. This work is needed and is not duplicated elsewhere in state government.

The Commission budget is modest. In fact, a fifth position is funded in the current fiscal budget, but has not been filled. This is a testament to the staff's work ethic and sensitivity to the State's fiscal crisis. As a provider, I depend on the staff for answers to obscure questions and know I will receive a timely and accurate response. The staff's reputation throughout the aging network is second to none. During my thirty years of service, I have not met or cannot think of person better suited to serve as Executive Director than Julie Evans Starr. Julie leads by example, with intelligence, humor, with composure and in memory of her grandfather who is her inspiration. For those reasons, the Commission staff meets their charge with thoughtful deliberations to impact the decision makers and work tirelessly to improve the life of older adults.

Connecticut has one of the highest populations of older adults in the country. Now is not the time for elimination. Now is the time to seize the opportunity to continue the work of this experienced Commission by rebalancing Medicaid to save the state hundreds of millions of dollars and to continue to have an independent and balanced resource to assist you during this tough financial climate. The Commission is a vital and intricate piece of state government. Their work is necessary and will not be provided elsewhere in State Government if eliminated.

Again thank you for this opportunity.