

Testimony of Dr. Waldo C. Klein

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To the Government Administration and Elections Committee Re S.B. 1144

March 23, 2009

Good morning Chairpersons Slossberg and Spallone and the other members of the GAE Committee. I'm Dr. Waldo Klein and I am speaking in support of Senate Bill 1144. I am the Vice Chairperson of the CT Commission on Aging and a professor of gerontology and research at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I have been professionally involved in studying and planning service systems for older adults for over twenty-five years.

Senate Bill 1144 presents the rare opportunity to provide a meaningful and positive response to the needs of a varied set of stakeholders and to do so without an expenditure of public or even private resources. In fact, Senate Bill 1144 is very likely to save state dollars during this difficult legislative session. Three fundamental realities will demonstrate why and how.

First, the nature of the life course, and of work and retirement has changed dramatically and will continue to do so. One hundred years ago the notion of retirement from labor was virtually non-existent. By the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the average age of retirement in our country was just over 60 years. Since then, this age has been creeping upwards and, most importantly, the very idea of "retirement" has morphed into a phase of life that very often included continued employment! In study after study, older adults report a continuing interest in maintaining a modified employment in retirement. Senate Bill 1144 provides a meaningful response to this changing social and economic reality.

Second, Connecticut has a labor force that is already facing serious challenges with respect to attracting and maintaining a skilled labor pool. Research by the CT Department of Labor has made this reality abundantly clear. As younger workers leave our state and older workers retire, we do not have the human capital to replace them. Private employers as well as state government have begun to feel this "pinch." Many of our state departments face losing very large proportions of their senior staff to retirements in the next few years. With these retiring people goes a huge storehouse of institutional memory, experience, and professional wisdom. Even if replacement workers were readily available -- and they are not -- the loss to agencies will be profound. And every employer knows about the tremendous costs of labor turnover under even the best of circumstances. Senate Bill 1144 creates a mechanism to hold on to the valuable resource that the in which the state has invested over the careers of older workers.

Third, older workers have clearly indicated their interest in flexibility and their willingness to continue to be productive participants in the labor force if workplace flexibility can be provided. Research conducted by the CT Commission on Aging and others has clearly found that part-time, flex-time, seasonal and telecommuting options would all function to retain the experience and productivity of older workers. Quite simply, a great many older workers want to continue to work; they just don't want to do so under the full-time and/or full-year conditions that have characterized their earlier careers. Senate Bill 1144 provides a mechanism that will meet the

needs of both employers and employees in structuring 21<sup>st</sup> century work patterns for older workers.

The legislation that you are considering creates a voluntary structure that will address the challenges created by a shrinking labor pool AND the interests of older workers to remain engaged with productive employment WITHOUT spending any money. Research and other testimony before you have established that the productivity level of older workers is high, and it is even higher when flexible workplace options are available. Employers, too, report high satisfaction with older workers with flexible arrangements.

In light of the current budget situation in our state, this legislation creates new opportunities for savings. Rather than mandatory furlough days and the potential of layoffs, workplace flexibility options created by Senate Bill 1144 offer positive and proactive accommodations to older workers to continue to contribute productively to our state agencies while reducing payrolls. This is legislation that will foster improved worker moral and productivity. By increasing productivity, it saves payroll dollars. It creates untold opportunities for ancillary savings from increasing personal capacity to provide care to children or older adults at home, moderating rush hour traffic, and countless other benefits that flow from the personal flexibility that is provided. Connecticut can realize the same gains that have been seized by other states through support of this bill.