



P1-2

Companions & Homemakers™

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January 27, 2009

Committee of Jurisdiction: Aging

Testimony of Companions & Homemakers, Inc. Regarding Raised Bill No. 5312

AN ACT CONCERNING CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR EMPLOYEES OF HOMEMAKER-COMPANION AGENCIES.

Founded in 1990, Companions & Homemakers, Inc. (C&H), is a homemaker-companion agency registered with the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection. C&H has 10 offices throughout the State of Connecticut. The company cares for over 3000 older adults and employs approximately 1600 caregivers.

C&H is offering this testimony in opposition to Raised Bill No. 5312

"AN ACT CONCERNING CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR EMPLOYEES OF HOMEMAKER-COMPANION AGENCIES"

C&H strongly supports the current statutory requirement that agencies conduct "comprehensive background checks" of caregivers. As an agency, C&H has been performing these checks since 1990. Our comprehensive background check consists of (i) a criminal records check performed by a private search firm; (ii) a check of the criminal conviction information (and other information) now made available to the public at no cost via the Connecticut Judicial Branch Website; (iii) a review of the totality of the information supplied in the employment application; (iv) a check of professional and personal references; and (v) a personal, face-to-face interview of the applicant.

C&H opposes Raised Bill No. 5312 for the following reasons:

1. A report from the Department of Public Safety (DPS) can take weeks to be issued and costs \$25 a piece. On the other hand, most private search firms used by agencies such as ours can generate similar reports often within hours and for fraction of the cost.

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2. The Department of Public Safety's criminal records check contains Connecticut criminal information only. On the other hand, search firms can generate criminal background checks that include Connecticut information as well as data from other jurisdictions. This is critical if the caregiver has recently relocated to Connecticut or has resided elsewhere.
3. Currently, an applicant for a caregiver position can be screened and placed with a client within hours of selection. Requiring a lengthy DPS background would hurt applicants economically, particularly those who are ready, willing, able, and otherwise qualified to enter the workforce immediately. This makes little sense in light of record unemployment state rates.
4. Based upon C&H's 19 years of experience in the field, we believe that the statutory requirement of comprehensive background checks for caregivers sufficiently protects the elderly consumer. There is no evidence that requiring a DPS criminal background check will result in reduced instances of elder financial, mental, or physical abuse.
5. If this bill becomes law, the cost of these DPS checks will be passed on to the consumer or the applicant. It will make the cost of home care less affordable to seniors, and will have a chilling effect on job seekers.
