



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.

Especially during these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed. The Connecticut Commission on Aging stands ready to assist this Committee and our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services.

Senate Bill 489: An Act Concerning a Single Point of Entry for Long-Term Care
~CoA Supports

The state's Long-Term Care Needs Assessment demonstrated a profound need for improved access to long-term care information. In fact, the need for information is so great that the creation of a single point of entry for information and referral across all ages and disabilities was a top recommendation of that comprehensive report. ("Single Point of Entry," "One Stop Shops," "No Wrong Door" and "Aging and Disability Resource Centers" or "ADRCs" are all terms used to describe a common concept.)

Currently, through a federal funding opportunity, Connecticut has a pilot program of an ADRC/Single Point of Entry designated in the South Central Region of the state (a partnership of the Department of Social Services, Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut and the Center for Disability Rights). This pilot was launched last fall and utilizes the CHOICES Program to serve individuals of *all ages* with long-term care needs. It is our understanding that the Department of Social Services intends to create a second ADRC this spring in the western region of the state.

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The Connecticut Commission on Aging supports expansion of the ADRC/Single Point of Entry concept statewide. Single Points of Entry also work hand-in-hand with efforts to provide more home and community-based care, such as the Money Follows the Person Demonstration Project.

Consumers in Connecticut are understandably confused by the myriad of public and private programs—all well-intentioned—designed to serve specific categories of individuals. The result is a highly fragmented system filled with many pilots, waivers and programs making it nearly impossible for the consumer to navigate and access. Furthermore, people do not know where to turn for a better understanding of public and private services and supports available. Further compounding the situation and most unfortunately, individuals and their families typically do not begin to explore their options until a crisis happens. All of these factors serve as huge barriers to being able to remain in the home and community.

These integrated points of entry into the long-term care system are designed to address many of the frustrations consumers and their families experience when trying to access needed information, services, and supports. Integrated points of entry strive to create community-wide service systems that reduce consumer confusion and build consumer trust and respect by enhancing individual choice and informed decision-making.

Additionally, Single Points of Entry can also help to break down barriers to community-based living by giving consumers information about the complete spectrum of long-term care options. Single Points of Entry enhance consumer choice in long-term care—and can be critical to state efforts to save significant dollars spent on long-term care. SPE initiatives could involve such efforts as enhanced technology utilizing a universal screening tool and diverting individuals from nursing homes.

This bill also proposes to add single point of entry information to the existing long-term care web site, which is maintained in a partnership between the CT Commission on Aging and the Office of Policy and Management. Information about the pilot ADRC is already included on the web site; the site is constantly updated and information about any additional ADRCs/Single Points of Entry that are created could be added to the web site within existing resources.

A single point of entry program would help ease understanding for individuals and their families as they plan for long-term care needs.

Senate Bill 664: An Act Concerning Billing for Assisted Living Services Covered by Long-Term Care Insurance

~CoA Supports

This bill would require assisted living services agencies to directly bill for services that are covered under residents' long-term care insurance policies.

The Commission on Aging supports this commonsense initiative. Those individuals who had the foresight to plan and purchase long-term care insurance policies should not have to pay up front for costly services and then wait for reimbursement from their insurance companies.

We ask for your support.

Senate Bill 814: An Act Concerning Personal Care Assistance Services Under the Connecticut Home Care Program for the Elderly

~CoA supports

This proposal would give participants in the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders the opportunity to hire and manage their own personal care attendants (PCAs). PCA services are an affordable way to provide care; they also allow individuals who have relationships with aides who are not working for an agency to keep those aides while accessing the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders. This proposal would enhance the ability of individuals to live in the community with dignity and the appropriate consumer-directed services.

In 2000, Connecticut created the Personal Care Assistance Pilot program. This pilot program has demonstrated that many individuals with long-term care needs are able to successfully manage their own care. The Connecticut General Assembly has seen fit to expand this program over the years. This bill seeks to provide these same services under the Connecticut Home Care Program. In essence, this would eliminate the need for a continuing pilot program.

This proposal is directly in line with recommendations from the state's Long-Term Care Needs Assessment, to foster flexibility in home care delivery and increase consumer choice. Additionally, it may create a more seamless system, providing for easier understanding on the part of consumers.

House Bill 5600: An Act Concerning Access to Comprehensive Factual Information Regarding Long-Term Care Facilities

~CoA Supports

This proposal empowers nursing home residents, potential residents and their families by providing them with information about on-duty staff, staff-patient ratios, and the facilities' quality ratings as determined by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The Commission on Aging supports all efforts to educate and inform individuals who are seeking long-term care services.

Facilities in Connecticut can and should provide comprehensive, clear information to help families make decisions about their loved ones' long-term care options. The Commission also believes that making this information publicly available and accessible will incent providers to take action to improve quality. Ideally, these efforts would take place in conjunction with affirmative incentives to promote a "culture change" promoting and honoring person-centered care in nursing facilities.

Property Tax-Related Bills

Senate Bill 244: An Act Concerning the Elderly Property Tax Freeze Program

House Bill 5299: An Act Increasing the Tax Relief Provided by the Circuit Breaker Program

House Bill 5300: An Act Increasing Income Eligibility for the Municipal Option for a Property Tax Freeze for the Elderly

House Bill 5676: An Act Concerning State Payment of Senior Property Taxes

~CoA Comments

Last year, the Commission, with the support of this committee, completed and published a report entitled "Property Tax Relief for Older Adults: A Profile of Connecticut's Local Programs." The report inventories existing local property tax relief programs, summarizes the findings and recommends six improvements designed to move our state towards greater information sharing and education.

The Commission encourages this Committee to consider these recommendations when considering modifications to or expansions of current programs:

- Information about existing state and local programs should be included in annual property tax bills, in language that is easy to read and to understand;
- The state should collect information about property tax relief programs annually and make this information available to the public;
- Local elected officials and assessors should have access to more information to help them make decisions about property tax relief programs and options for implementing revaluation;
- Property tax relief programs should be provided in an equitable manner to low and moderate income households;
- The state should examine the possibility of combining or streamlining existing property tax relief programs to achieve efficiency and for ease of use by residents; and,
- Existing programs and their use should be considered as part of comprehensive tax reform.

The property tax relief report is available on our website, at www.cga.ct.gov/coa, and hard copies can be provided as requested. We would be happy to work with you to craft legislation that supports the recommendations of this report.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment. 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.