



*A nonpartisan research and public policy office of the
Connecticut General Assembly*

Testimony of

Julia Evans Starr, Executive Director
Connecticut Commission on Aging

Appropriations Committee
February 18, 2010

RE: CT Commission on Aging Budget in FY 10 -11

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator Debicella, Representative Miner, esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Julie Evans Starr and I am the Executive Director of the CT Commission on Aging. Thank you for the opportunity to present today. I do so to ask for your continued support and that you retain the CoA's budget of \$256,071 for fy 2010-2011.

In the face of these challenging fiscal times we, at the Commission on Aging, are unwavering in our dedication and innovation ~ and have proven that we are truly a part of the solution! Through our work we analyze demographic trends, maximize state and federal funds, work across branches of state government, identify greater efficiencies within state government, lead cutting-edge research and promote national trends and best practices. In other words, we represent the very best of state government. To paraphrase a colleague and leader in the aging network for over 30 years – “You would be hard-pressed to spend \$250,000 any more wisely!”

CoA is a Model for Results-Based Accountability: We applaud this committee's data-driven decision-making utilizing Results-Based Accountability and look forward to continuing our collaboration with this committee and the RBA subcommittee. As we work together, you will quickly see the highly complex and multi-faceted aging-related issues the CoA is tackling as it helps turn the curve. The selected data on a range of issues is compelling. It steers us to make smart policy decisions that prioritize the state's precious resources to improve the quality of life for its residents and ensure the overall health of the state budget. Through RBA, the CoA's performance reveals a low-cost, highly efficient and effective agency that delivers a sound investment in CT's future.

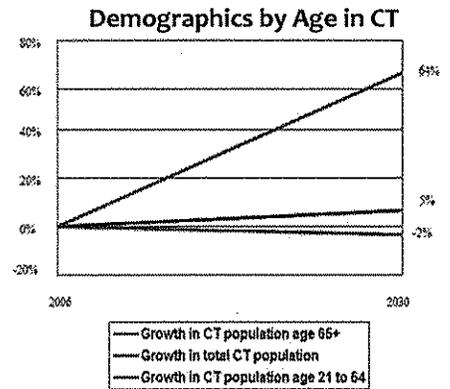
CoA's Overall Budget: As you know, the Commission on Aging's present budget is \$234,416 (representing .001% of the entire state budget). Public Act 09-3 and the governor's subsequent holdback reductions cut the already lean CoA budget by 55%. Though this significant reduction is consistent with the cuts made to all of the Legislative Commissions, it is important to note that we are all at various levels of funding and staffing. The CoA, along with AAAC, remains the smallest commission in these terms. These funds go primarily towards Personal Services for our professional staff of four (now budgeted for 2.4 FTE staff, including me). Therefore, eliminating the CoA, as the governor has proposed, would only save the state money –and a very small amount at that-- through employee layoffs as we are nonunionized. This obviously runs contrary to “jobs creation” initiatives. Even more important, reducing our budget further would prohibit us from meeting on our mandate on behalf of a growing constituency. Further, it would take away one of your most important resources.

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CoA Prepares CT for an Aging and Long- Lived Demographic:

The CoA has brought dedicated focus and objective direction based in large part on demographic trends. Connecticut is the 7th oldest state in the nation. Demographics indicate that our population of older adults will explode in the next twenty years. By 2030 our 65+ population will increase by 64%. People are also living longer. As our older population grows and experiences unprecedented longevity, it will impact nearly every facet of society and state government is no exception. The CoA works with the Legislature, policymakers on all levels and diverse stakeholders to meet these challenges, prioritize funding and plan for our state's future.



CoA Maximizes State and Federal Funds: The CoA recently identified and helped bring into the state \$11 million of untapped federal funds. CoA's expertise, vigilance and reach across branches of government helped secure and maximize these federal funds. Without the CoA, the money would not have been realized. It is worth noting that this significant amount is almost 50 times the CoA annual budget. These funds do not go into the CoA budget, but rather back into the State budget and will in part be used to transform and streamline CT's long-term care system.

We also were successful last session in identifying and removing (with your help) a policy roadblock which had stalled federally funded assisted living conversion projects. Representatives of the federal government (HUD) were clear – if the state law did not change, CT would not receive any additional federal funds for this worthy program. To understand the magnitude of the implication – CT has received over \$65 million in federal funds for this program to date.

We can't expect policymakers to know about every federal funding opportunity or distinct nuances of every aging-related issue, initiative or program – rather, we are that expert resource for you. I have attached a one-pager more fully describing our recent achievements to maximize state and federal funds.

I would assert – especially, during tough fiscal times -that revenue- generating entities and skillful problem-solvers should not be eliminated. Instead, perhaps they should be incentivized or rewarded—or at least fully funded to maximize their effectiveness.

CoA Looks at the Big Picture and Works on Major Systemic Change: CoA provides significant energy and critical leadership in the area of long-term care, which represent over \$2 billion, or 13%, of the state budget. Using research and recommendations from the state's Long-Term Care Plan and Needs Assessment, CoA has developed a series of policy proposals that would honor the U.S. Supreme Court Olmstead Decision, CT state law (PA 01-119), streamline state government, and potentially save Connecticut hundreds of millions of dollars each year. Additionally, these proposals increase choice in how and where people of all ages receive care, thereby enhancing quality of life for hundreds of thousands of people.

As part of this leadership, CoA co-chairs the legislatively mandated Long-Term Care Advisory Council, a remarkable collaboration of providers, consumers and advocates for older adults and persons with disabilities. Through this collaboration, the CoA brings together diverse stakeholders to work toward a unified goal for people of all ages in need of long-term care services and supports.

Another CoA initiative addresses the economic security of older adults, while also mitigating looming workforce shortages. Our “Redefining Retirement Years” initiative involved statewide focus groups and national research and resulted in a series of published reports, utilizing in-house staff and volunteers. Our latest report on this issue resulted in policy options that could save the **state millions of dollars annually** by providing more flexible work opportunities for its workers. Ironically, it is through the Legislature’s Volunteer Work Schedule Flexibility Program that the CoA is able to continue producing such quality work in light of significant budget reductions.

CoA develops and cultivates the direct care workforce. As chair of the MFP workforce development subcommittee, CoA has been developing a 5-year strategic plan to address the needs of the workforce infrastructure. It is estimated that in the next five years the home and community based infrastructure will need an additional 9,000 jobs. As a leader in statewide planning efforts, CoA will continue to work with state agencies, community partners, workforce investment boards and various other stakeholders to recruit, retain and train thousands of workers for careers in the home and community based care.

CoA is a Highly Efficient State Agency: To accomplish our work with maximum efficiency, we have always pursued creative means to achieve our results. In illustration, the CoA has:

- associations with the UConn School of Social Work and UConn Law School, and enlisted high-quality, unpaid interns and research volunteers;
- working relationships with many stakeholders and partners such as providers, consumers, and the business community, from your districts and across the state; and
- 21 unpaid, volunteer board members from throughout the state. Few state agencies are comprised of a ratio of 5 volunteer/ unpaid (zero reimbursement) experts to 1 state employee. (Here’s a snapshot of a few of our members: The chief of geriatrics at St. Raphael Hospital in New Haven, several heads of municipal departments on elderly and senior centers, the former director of Elderly Services at the Department of Social Services, the president of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Social Workers/Connecticut Chapter; retired business attorney/executives of major corporations.)

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed and delivered consistently by the Connecticut Commission on Aging. Our demonstrated leadership, broad reach, expertise and responsible financial management will serve the state well during the 2010 session and in the months and years ahead.

We thank you for this opportunity.

The Connecticut Commission on Aging Maximizes Federal Funds And is a Strategic Investment for the State

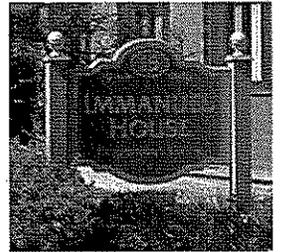


Recently, the CoA was successful in championing policy changes that help people age in their homes and communities. These changes give people a choice in how and where they live and receive services ~and at the same time bring into the state tens of millions of new federal dollars!

With a nominal budget of \$234,000, CoA is clearly a wise investment for Connecticut.

The following highlights two of the CoA's recent successes:

1. **Housing Opportunities for Low-Income Older Adults:** The availability of appropriate, affordable housing is a significant barrier for individuals hoping to "age in place" or return to the community through efforts such as Money Follows the Person.



The federal Assisted Living Conversion Program provides money to low-income congregate housing facilities (section 202 housing) to convert into assisted living facilities. This federal money is used to build communal laundry facilities, dining areas and make other upgrades that allow residents to receive assisted living services on-site.

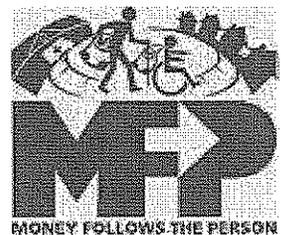
To date, 271 individuals have received these services in the past six years, at a state cost of approximately \$27,000 annually per person (versus \$62,000 annually for nursing home care).

However, existing state law (CGS §8-206e) restricted Connecticut to having only four of these projects, limiting the state's ability to receive federal funds. The Commission on Aging identified this obstacle and successfully worked with policymakers to lift this restriction (PA 09-5).

Connecticut has received over \$65 million in federal funds for this program to date.

Without this change in state law, our state would have been ineligible for any additional federal funds for this worthy program.

2. **Money Follows the Person:** In late May, the Commission on Aging detected a trend with individuals being transitioned out of nursing homes and back into the community under the Money Follows the Person program. Because of a quirk in Connecticut's "operating protocol," our state was receiving extra federal funds on approximately half of the transitions, leaving additional federal money in Washington. After identifying this trend, the CoA educated policymakers and, as a result, the administration submitted the change to the federal government, which approved it. **This oversight activity of the CoA has the potential to bring up to \$11 million in new federal money into Connecticut.**



The Commission on Aging is established under CGS §17b-420. Our mission is to serve as an objective, credible source of information on issues affecting Connecticut's older adults, to prepare our state for the needs of its soaring older adult population and to provide accountability within state government.

For more information, please contact the Connecticut Commission on Aging, at 860-240-5200.

