Testimony of Waldo Klein, PhD

In Support of the Connecticut Commission on Aging

Appropriations Committee

February 18, 2010

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Connecticut Commission on Aging. My name is Waldo Klein. I am a resident of Mansfield and a professor of research and gerontology at the UConn School of Social Work. I am also the former vice-chair and a long-time member of the Connecticut Commission on Aging.

I have studied aging and aging policy for nearly 30 years. In my business, some important things stand out as truisms. First, virtually all of the best projections about our aging population have underestimated the demographic reality that actually evolves; and second, if you live long enough, you will face the challenges of aging!

Quite simply, we have become very successful as a society at getting older and it appears that we will continue to do so in the coming decades. Unfortunately, we have not shown the commitment to planning for these unfolding challenges.

Today I ask you to make a wise decision and demonstrate your continued support for the Connecticut Commission on Aging, a nonpartisan agency in the legislative branch of government that has a proven track record of proactively supporting our state in preparing for the future.

This is the second year in a row that Governor Rell has called for the elimination of this and other legislative Commissions. To eliminate the Commission on Aging may be penny-wise, but it is certainly pound foolish.

As one who specializes in gerontology, research and prevention, I believe that the Commission's unique role is to bring research to the forefront of public policymaking. From the most comprehensive Long-Term Care Needs Assessment in the country (completed with the UConn Center on Aging) to U.S. Census data, to foundation research, the staff and board members are able to gather information, and translate it into good public policy.

The goal for public policy is not to "recreate the wheel," but to model Best Practices, while responding to the needs of Connecticut residents and remaining committed to what is best for the state as a whole.

As a former board member, I can testify to the commitment of the volunteer members who have been appointed to the Commission. These individuals come from a broad variety of backgrounds—the business world, medicine, academics, senior centers, government, nursing homes and more.

It is one of the most truly bipartisan groups with which I have ever had the pleasure of working. Intentional consideration of the best policy for an aging state – rather than political ideology – draws the members together, without pay, to share their knowledge and provide assistance and guidance to the small, dedicated and experienced staff.

Together, the board and staff gather information about our older population, monitor programs and services, and work with policymakers across state and local government. The value of this expertise far exceeds the Commission's budget of $256,000 for FY '11 (notably, a 53% reduction from FY '09).

As a state taxpayer, I am exceptionally well pleased with the return on this investment.

Last year, the Commission identified and helped the state pursue over $11 million in federal funds that was being left in Washington.

As a result of the Commission's relentless attention to this issue, our state will receive these funds through the Money Follows the Person grant, in addition to becoming eligible for additional funds for the conversion of low-income senior housing into assisted living facilities. This single initiative provides income to our state that would fund the current budget for the Commission for forty-four years!

Finally, the Commission has been a model for Results-Based Accountability (RBA), an evaluation tool championed by this Committee. Despite a recent budget cut, which has reduced staff time significantly, the Commission's RBA product is a high-quality document, providing information about Connecticut's older- adults' status on quality of life indicators, as well as ideas for progress on those indicators.

Please take the opportunity to carefully examine the Commission's performance report card. I am certain you will get a clear sense of how much "return" you get from this small agency.

Thank you for your support of this valued resource.