Testimony of

Dianne Stone

in Support of the Connecticut Commission on Aging

Appropriations Committee

Thursday, February 18, 2010

My name is Dianne Stone. I am the director of the Newington Senior and Disabled Center. I am also the Vice President and former President of the Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel, the former President of the Connecticut Association of Municipal Agents for the Elderly, a delegate to the National Institute of Senior Centers, the Chair of the National Senior Center Accreditation Board and a long-term member of the Connecticut Elder Action Network (CEAN). I also sat as a member of the Task Force to Study the Re-establishment of the Department on Aging.

I list all of these involvements not to establish my credibility, but to demonstrate my passion for serving the older adults of this state. It is with this same passion that I urge you to reject the Governor's call to eliminate the Connecticut Commission on Aging.

I understand the ongoing budget crisis. I live it professionally as our municipal budget is squeezed and we accept that we must do more with less. I live it personally as people around me lose their jobs and their homes. I also understand that we are currently at the front of a demographic tidal wave that will create challenges in serving an older population unlike any we have seen. You, the legislature, will face policy challenges that will have enormous impact not only on the budget, but on the quality of life of our residents. Now, more than ever, we need a strong Commission on Aging to guide our programs and policies.

When the issue of the need for various commissions has been discussed, there have been concerns that there is overlap with other agencies. Let's be clear about what the role of the Commission on Aging is and, more importantly, what it is not. The Commission is an agency of the legislature that exists to serve as an objective, credible source of information on issues affecting older adults and to provide accountability within state government. It is not an executive branch department charged with providing a discrete menu of programs and services. There is no agency, nor will there be, that does the same work as the Commission on Aging. The Commission on Aging and a Department on Aging are not interchangeable.

The Commission on Aging has the ability to reach out to other groups and agencies and has done so with great success. As the lead agency in CEAN, the Commission has brought together leaders in Connecticut's aging network. The Commission has the

capacity to cross department lines to gather information on older adults in areas as diverse as property tax, transportation, housing and health care.

As you know, last Spring, the Commission on Aging identified more than $11 million in new federal funds for our state that do not require additional state expenditures. Shortly thereafter, when the budget was passed, the Commission was hit with a 53% budget cut, reducing their budget to about $230,000 annually. The Commission continues to seek and offer ways to streamline state government, while improving programs and services, as well as to maximize federal funds coming into the state.

I am sure that you have heard from others who support the Commission on Aging more eloquently and intelligently than I. Let me be direct: as a legislature faced with the challenges of an aging population, you need the Commission on Aging. As a service provider in the aging network, I need the Commission on Aging. Most importantly, the thousands of older adults and the families that support them need the Commission on Aging. I urge you to ensure its survival.