



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

Testimony of

Julia Evans Starr, Executive Director
Connecticut Commission on Aging

General Administration and Elections Committee
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RE: Senate Bill 28, An Act Consolidating State Agencies and Eliminating Certain Legislative Commissions. Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hetherington, esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections 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 of the Commission on Aging and rejection of Senate Bill 28.

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 Streamlined State Government: This Committee has taken the lead in seeking streamlined, efficient use of taxpayer dollars across state government. In many ways, the Commission on Aging is in fact a model for other state agencies to follow. For example, similar to the SmART Initiative in the Executive Branch, the CoA and the other legislative commissions share administrative functions through the Office of Legislative Management (e.g., personnel, payroll, business functions, etc).

Furthermore, with the passage of PA 09-7 in September, the General Assembly rewrote the statutes of the legislative commissions to give increased responsibilities and laser-sharp focus to our work. At the same time, our already lean budget was cut by over 53%.

Specific to the CoA, our four staff members (equivalent of 2.4 FTE) work in a team-oriented manner, making our office nimble and flexible. As only one illustration, we do not have a dedicated administrative assistant; when the phone rings or copies need to be made, whichever of us is most available handles the job. We represent the complete opposite of “government bureaucracy.”

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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 enlists 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.)

CoA Maximizes State and Federal Funds: Though we are the one of the smallest commissions from a budget perspective, we are highly effective. 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 represents 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

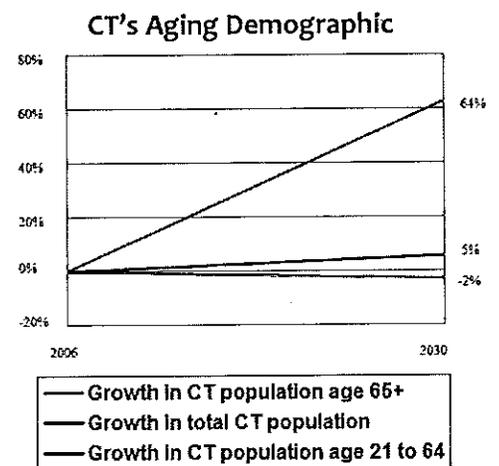
dollars each year. Additionally, these proposals increase choice in how and where people of all ages receive care, thereby enhancing quality of life for hundreds of thousands of people. We look forward to working with you to turn these proposals into action.

As part of its 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.

Most recently, CoA has been pleased to work with members of the business community in these efforts. The recently released report by the CT Regional Institute for the 21st Century supports our work and the recommendations contained in the Long-Term Care Plan and the Needs Assessment. Business leaders across the state recognize the importance of transforming how our state provides long-term care services and supports—and CoA's role in that effort.

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.



Some of the other issues facing our state as a result of demographic changes include:

- a redefined idea of retirement, as Baby Boomers choose to—or have to—work longer into their lives, with perhaps additional work flexibility;
- economic challenges faced by older adults, during this recession and beyond;
- a need for more home health aides and other professionals to help provide services to individuals as they age;
- new modes of transportation, to help individuals get to doctors' appointments and social engagements after they have stopped driving;
- a focus on prevention, such as for falls, to avoid costly hospitalizations and unnecessary institutionalizations; and,
- housing that is both affordable and appropriate to individuals with long-term care needs.

CoA lends research, data and objective analysis on all of these topics and more.

CoA is a Model for Results-Based Accountability: We applaud the movement in the legislature toward data-driven decision-making utilizing Results-Based Accountability and look forward to continuing our stellar RBA work. Once you become familiar with our RBA product, 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.

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.