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Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing

Testimony of

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CT Commission on Aging Member**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment once again on the impact of Governor Rell's unfortunate proposal (S.B. 28) to eliminate the Connecticut Commission on Aging ("the Commission.")

The Commission works independently within the Legislative Branch of Government on world-class research and public-policy initiatives. It is your dedicated resource on the increasingly complex issues facing our state and its older population. Its work is duplicated nowhere else within, or outside, state government.

It is the voice for hundreds of thousands of people who receive meals-on-wheels, live in nursing homes and in our communities, struggling to accept the changes and loss experienced every day due to the aging process. Likewise, it is helping Connecticut prepare for the profound impact one million baby boomers will have on our state as they begin turning 65 next year.

The non-partisan Commission works for the people—your constituents—who cannot be here today to testify, but who benefit from its diligence and expertise.

In fact, taxpayers of all ages benefit through the Commission's diligent, fiscally responsible approach to its work. It has presented the General Assembly with solid, actionable, "doable" recommendations, supported by world-class research that can save Connecticut hundreds of millions of dollars a year on Medicaid long-term care costs alone. I implore you and your colleagues to seriously consider these recommendations and to show the leadership needed to implement them. The Commission stands ready to help you.

As a provider, I depend on the staff for answers to obscure questions and know I will receive a timely, objective and accurate response. No doubt many of you and your colleagues within the General Assembly and throughout government have had the same experience.

The Commission gathers information by holding Town Hall meetings throughout the state. This is a means to create a dialogue with seniors, their family, friends, neighbors, and service providers, to learn how people are managing.

The Commission is recognized on a national level for its world-class research work on Long- Term Care, and for bringing the Earth's Elders Exhibit, not only to our state Capitol, but also to the Rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. Their intergenerational work is cutting edge, which is substantiated through their partnership with school districts to implement the Earth's Elders curriculum in classrooms, which teaches students about the wisdom of elders and nurtures respect and relationships.

By any standard, the Commission's budget is modest. In fact, as you well know, its already modest budget was recently reduced by 53%. This is unconscionable. The four-person professional staff has taken salary reductions of up to 50%. The fact they continue to carry on in the highest of professional standards is a testament to their work ethic.

The staff's reputation throughout the aging network is second to none. During my thirty years of service, I have not met or cannot think of a person better suited to serve as Executive Director than Julia Evans Starr. She leads by example, with intelligence and humor, with composure, and in memory of her grandfather who is her inspiration. For those reasons, the Commission staff meets its charge with thoughtful deliberations to impact decision- makers and work tirelessly to improve the life of older adults.

Connecticut has one of the highest populations of older adults in the country. Now is not the time to eliminate such a critically important resource. I would, in fact, argue that now is the time to restore the Commission's budget.

Now is the time to seize the opportunity to continue the work of this experienced Commission by rebalancing Medicaid to save the state hundreds of millions of dollars (as recommended by the Commission) and to continue to have an independent and balanced resource to assist you during this tough financial climate.

The Commission is a vital and intricate piece of state government. Its work is necessary and will not be provided elsewhere in State government, either in any existing or proposed agency, if it is eliminated.

Again, thank you for this opportunity.