

Testimony of

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Connecticut Commission on Aging

*House Bill 5202: An Act Concerning Telecommuting Options for State Employees*  
Committee on Labor and Public Employees

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Thank you for this opportunity to comment today on an issue of import to older adults, families with children and to the effective, efficient administration of state government.

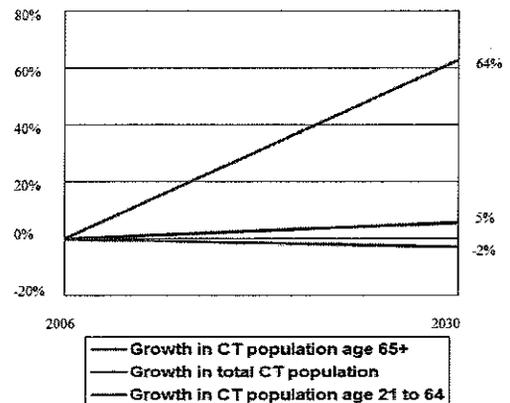
As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging (CoA) is an independent, nonpartisan state agency that is part of the legislative branch of government. We are devoted to preparing our state for a burgeoning aging population while promoting policies that enhance the lives of the present and future generations of older adults. For sixteen years, the Commission has served as an effective leader in statewide efforts to promote choice, independence and dignity for Connecticut's older adults and persons with disabilities.

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed and provided by the CoA. We pledge to continue to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping its commitments to critical programs and services.

House Bill 5202 strengthens existing law so that telecommuting for state employees is more broadly encouraged and promoted. Offering greater options for telecommuting would bring the state on board with an initiative that many private companies in Connecticut and across the nation have embraced. In fact, Telecommute Connecticut! is a state government initiative, publicly endorsed by Governor Rell, to encourage and facilitate telecommuting options for private companies; yet, telecommuting options for state employees remain extremely limited.

Addressing the cost, satisfaction, and quality of the state workforce, in meaningful ways, is ripe for opportunity. CoA brings a unique perspective to this discussion. We have produced a series of research reports about how retirement has been and will continue to be redefined, particularly as the Baby Boomers age. The Redefining Retirement Years initiative was launched in 2006 in keeping with the Commission's statutory mandate to assess emerging issues affecting Connecticut's present and future generations of older adults. With medical advances, individuals are now living longer, higher quality lives, long past the standard age of retirement. Our work and national studies show that retirement is no longer only about golf and relaxation; most retirees want to stay engaged in their communities, and many want or need to continue to work, albeit with a great deal more flexibility.

CT Demographics by Age



Focus groups that the Commission ran in 2006 in partnership with the state Department of Labor and the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission examined the changing demographic of the state's public and private workforce. The research showed that older adults are looking for shorter work weeks, durational projects or other flexible options, instead of rigid daily work schedules, five days a week, fifty weeks a year. Importantly, older adults have institutional knowledge and expertise that is difficult to replace. Private companies who have offered flexible schedules for their workers have seen lower turnover, less use of sick leave, increased employee productivity and improved morale—and significant cost savings.

Last year, we enlisted a UConn Law student, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of workforce flexibility in the private sector, common myths, other states' initiatives, current Connecticut law and the benefits of adopting a culture of workplace flexibility in Connecticut. This research uncovered a variety of initiatives in other states, such as Florida, Virginia and Arizona, which were the basis for this proposal.

State government, as the largest employer in the state of Connecticut, should lead by example. What has happened to date is that state employees retire, and when the agency decides that their knowledge and expertise are still needed, the employees are hired back for a short time; this has led to public and media outrage over “double dipping.”

But this “double dipping” does not need to occur. We can design our personnel policies to facilitate the types of workplace flexibility that we know older adults want and which will help our state plan better moving forward—and save the state money.

Therefore, in addition to strengthening telecommuting for state employees, the CoA recommends expanding the bill to cover additional, proven, options including: voluntary schedule reduction, flexible work schedules, and a phased-in retirement option. We ask that you respectfully review SB 1144, An Act Concerning Flexible Work Schedules and Telecommuting Options for State Employees. This is a bill the CoA developed last year with the GAE committee.

First, a voluntary schedule reduction initiative would allow individuals of all ages to be more productive during their working hours and, with supervisor approval, to gain more hours of time for themselves and their families. Employees would, of course, have their salaries proportionally reduced. The second initiative calls for flexible work schedules, again with supervisor approval. Although many jobs done by state employees must be done during set hours, many other tasks (such as report writing) could be done when more convenient for employees. These first two initiatives, although designed with older workers in mind, would certainly benefit younger employees with families as well.

The third initiative is an innovative idea that could result in significant cost savings, without the loss of knowledge that is inherent to an Early Retirement Incentive Program. The “phased-in retirement” initiative would allow employees within five years of retirement to reduce their hours to begin their transition to a new lifestyle, and hopefully, to begin succession planning for the agency once they have departed. Under this initiative, employees would still accrue retirement benefits as if they had not reduced their hours; the state would save money during the employees' last few years of tenure with the agency. This is a win-win proposal that should be on the table right now, as our state struggles with an enormous budget gap.

We ask for your support of these initiatives, which, in addition to helping older adults continue to be productive, also generate with significant cost savings.

We would be most pleased to work with this committee and other interested parties on this legislation moving forward. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Commission office, at (860) 240-5200.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this important issue.