

## TESTIMONY AGAINST THE ELIMINATION OF THE COMMISSION ON AGING

Cindy Dubuque

Discharge Planner, Leeway

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Honorable Senators and Representatives:

My name is Cindy Dubuque and I am a graduate student at the UCONN School of Social Work, and the Discharge Planner for Leeway Inc. Leeway is a Skilled Nursing Facility for individuals diagnosed with HIV, and is the only facility dedicated solely to caring for those with HIV/AIDS.

Thank you for allowing me to comment today about the Governor's Bill (An Act Consolidating State Agencies and Eliminating Certain Legislative Commissions). Specifically, I am against the legislation to eliminate the Commission on Aging, and ask that you continue to support their work to improve and promote public policy that benefits one of CT's most vulnerable populations.

The Commission on Aging (CoA) provides an important service of reviewing policies, budgets and procedures that affect the elderly while protecting their rights. In addition, the CoA helps direct policy to fulfill the obligations of the Supreme Court decision *Olmstead* and Connecticut state law (CGS §17b-337) requiring individuals with long-term care needs to have the option to choose and receive long-term care and support in the least restrictive, appropriate setting. Recently, the Commission on Aging was able to identify approximately 11 million dollars in Medicaid enhanced matching funds to support Money Follows the Person (MFP). Without this money, and this program, hundreds of elderly and disabled residents of nursing homes would not be able to transition to an appropriate living environment of their choice. It is thanks to the CoA that 41 people have been transitioned and are now living in the community. I would like to tell you about one of those individuals who has benefited from CoA's commitment to the elderly and disabled through MFP.

Samantha, (not her real name) is a Latina woman who lives with HIV. She resided at Leeway for approximately three years while she worked on getting herself both physically and mentally healthy. While out in the community prior, Samantha struggled with substance abuse issues and acquired daily living skills such as bathing and dressing. Despite these challenges, she decided that she wanted to transition to the community so that she could spend time with her daughter and granddaughter. Though they would visit her regularly, she felt that her life was incomplete while living at Leeway. Thankfully, MFP was a viable option for Samantha and her family. With the Personal Care Assistance (PCA) waiver, Samantha was able to hire her daughter for a certain number of hours each day to assist her with daily living tasks. This was beneficial to both Samantha and her daughter, not only economically, but because it helped them to reconnect on a different level. Visiting nurses have reported back to me that Samantha and her daughter are doing quite well, and that after her daughter has put in her time for the day working, she will continue to stay with her mom chatting and playing cards.

Samantha's experience is testimony to the impact that policy can have on the micro level. Currently, I have four people in process with MFP, who now have the opportunity to leave Leeway and get the supports needed to succeed in the community. The Commission on Aging supports my work as a Discharge Planner by making recommendations for policies and programs that make a difference in the lives of those who are elderly and disabled.

Please defend our parents, grandparents and our future by supporting the Commission on Aging by voting "no" to the Governor's proposal.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today on this matter and I am available for any questions.

Cindy Dubuque

Discharge Planner

Leeway, Inc.

[cdubuque@leeway.net](mailto:cdubuque@leeway.net)

40 Albert St.

New Haven, CT. 06511

203-865-0068