

Testimony of Joanne Byrne
Appropriations Committee
Thursday, February 18, 2010

Re: Connecticut Commission on Aging

My name is Joanne Byrne and I am the Senior Services Coordinator for the Town of Orange. I also coordinate and run the Orange Senior Leadership Program, which identifies aspiring community leaders over the age of 55 and provides leadership training and community education so they may serve as catalysts for positive change in their own community. **I ask you to reject Governor Rell's call to eliminate the Connecticut Commission on Aging.**

I am sure you are familiar with the demographic projections for our country and our state. With the aging of the largest generation in our country's recent history—the Baby Boomers—Connecticut's population of seniors is projected to increase by 64% in the next twenty years. In Orange, already almost 1 of 5 residents is over the age of 65. These seniors add vitality and richness to our community and our state.

The Connecticut Commission on Aging is the only agency—either public or private—that is positioned to help guide state policy affecting older adults through these challenging times. With its connections to academic experts, providers, state and local government officials and policymakers, it provides a unique perspective and is able to bring together stakeholders to craft public policy that is in the best interests of the state as a whole.

In addition, these connections allow the Commission to identify federal funding opportunities for our state. Just last year, for example, the Commission helped our state pursue over \$11 million in new federal funds. It also worked with policymakers to remove an obstacle in state law that stood in the way of new federal money for low-income assisted living projects. As you know, appropriate affordable housing is the largest barrier to continued successful community living.

Although the Commission on Aging received a 53% budget cut for the current fiscal year, its staff and volunteer board remain committed to this state and to being a part of the solution to the budget crisis. Its four part-time staff members serve on numerous statewide advisory panels, testify at the Legislature, and bring academic research and national Best Practices to the attention of executive and legislative branch policymakers. I have had the personal pleasure of working with the Commission and listening to their expertise and wisdom during the Orange Senior Leadership Program's annual trip to the State Capitol complex.

Understanding that the state budget is out of balance, I ask you to focus on state departments with larger budgets and more discretionary spending. The Commission's budget is only \$256,000 for FY '11—eliminating it will not only be detrimental to our state, but the savings will barely make a dent in the projected deficit.

Thank you.