Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative

"Enhancing the effectiveness of disability activism by organizing and empowering individuals, families, groups and organizations"

Testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly General Administration and Elections Committee

OPPOSE elimination of the CT Commission on Aging
SB 28 – An Act Consolidating State Agencies and Eliminating Certain Legislative Commissions.

March 17, 2010

Good Afternoon:

The Disability Advocacy Collaborative is a state-wide, cross-disability advocacy organization dedicated to the twin goals of empowering individuals with physical and mental disabilities to advocate for their needs, and promoting opportunities for them to live their lives in the mainstream of society. In recent years we have begun working closely with the Commission on Aging as the needs of elders and the needs of younger people with disabilities are so similar in nature.

Support for expanding community living options - which include, among other things, the DSS Money Follows the Person initiative - is a major point of connection between the Collaborative and the Commission. Other areas of mutual concern include addressing the growing need for an in-home care workforce, transportation, housing, and health care.

The staff of the Commission is well informed on issues concerning people with disabilities and elders, and has proven to be a source of expertise for the legislative branch, the executive branch and community stakeholders. Knowledgeable and respected, they often help lay the foundation for the construction of programs and services that can be considered exemplary and for which the state should be proud. They are also public educators, bringing to elders in Connecticut, as well as the general public, up-to-date information about services and supports available to them through public and private programs. The small staff of the Commission not only provides an invaluable service to a number of constituencies, but also saves the state money. They should not only be thanked for their efforts, but supported in continuing their highly competent work.

As the former Assistant Director of the State Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, I know how important independent experts are in relationship to service - providing agencies. When removed from responsibility to provide direct services, independent agencies like the Commission can take a step back and look at the human service systems with a critical eye. They can "tell it like it is" and shine a light on programs that are working well in the state as well as programs that are not.

Independence doesn't always mean effectiveness, however, but I can testify to the fact that in Connecticut, the Commission on Aging is one of Connecticut's treasures. The Commission has already sustained a 53% budget cut in the last budget, and yet with resilience and dedication they continue to forge ahead providing unqualified expertise.

The population of those over 65 will grow by 64% over the next twenty years. The Commission should not be abandoned in this time of need, with the population of elders, many of whom have disabilities, growing day by day.

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