



**Testimony of**

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**Committee on Aging**

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on a few of the bills before you today.

The Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel (CASCP) is an association of professionals working in Senior Centers across the State. The organization exists as a network to enhance member Centers across the State. We work together to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery in all Senior Centers. We are affiliated with the National Institute of Senior Centers, a program of the National Council on Aging.

Before I present my testimony, I would like to thank the members of the Committee on Aging for their support of Senior Centers within their own districts and across the State and especially for the passage of the Act Concerning Senior Centers and the Freedom of Information Act. Bills that relate directly to Senior Centers do not come along very often.

**SB 139 – An Act Concerning Persons Residing in Elderly Housing and Members of Senior Centers**

*- CASCP does not support this*

This proposal seeks to establish a senior citizen's bill of rights for residents of elderly housing projects and members of Senior Centers. In my 25 years as a staunch supporter of rights, I never thought I would be speaking in opposition to the establishment of a statement of rights for any group. And in my 12 years in the Senior Center field, I never thought I would be speaking in opposition to the establishment of ethical policy in Senior Centers. But Senior Centers simply do not fit into this Bill. It was clearly written in the context of a residential setting. Other than the fact that we both serve older adults, Senior Centers and Senior Housing have very little in common. In fact, while "elderly housing" is defined, there is no clear definition of "Senior Center" here or in any other statute. Approximately 85% of Senior Centers in the State are municipally owned and operated

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and presumably they would be affected. The other 15% likely use some public funding so may be included as well.

There are several areas of the rights that the Bill prescribes that do not apply to typical Senior Centers. For example:

**(1) Be treated with consideration, respect and due recognition of personal dignity, individuality and the need for privacy;**

*Senior Centers are public facilities; similar to libraries and community centers (in fact, some of our Centers are in community centers). As such, there is no reasonable expectation of privacy within our building. We certainly try to protect confidentiality, but we cannot guarantee privacy.*

**(2) Privacy within a private residential unit, subject to rules of the elderly housing project reasonably designed to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the resident;**

*This clearly does not apply to Senior Centers.*

**(3) Private communications, including receiving and sending unopened correspondence, telephone access and visiting with persons of one's own choice;**

*Again, as a public facility, Senior Center participants do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy. We do not accept mail on behalf of our members; we do not necessarily provide telephone access and; we do not monitor visiting. This does not apply to Senior Centers.*

**(4) Freedom to participate in and benefit from community services and activities so as to achieve the highest possible level of independence, autonomy and interaction within the community;**

*The provision of community services and activities is at the core of a Senior Center's existence. As public agencies we are subject to laws like the ADA and civil and human rights laws that govern who can participate in programs. Some Centers also establish eligibility criteria like residency in the community, age restrictions and, an ability to participate independently. And some have established a behavioral code for participation that prescribes both the expectations of behavior (e.g. no fighting, intoxication, lewd behavior etc.) and the consequences of such behavior.*

**(5) Exercise civil and religious liberties;**

*With the exception of policies that govern the political use of public facilities, this could apply to Senior Centers. For example, the Town of Newington prohibits distribution and/or display of campaign literature within its public buildings.*

**(6) Meet with other residents or members to discuss the policies, procedures and services of the elderly housing project or senior center;**

*This would apply to Senior Centers. In fact, we encourage it!*

**(7) Present grievances and recommend changes in policies, procedures and services to the manager or staff of the elderly housing project or senior center, government officials or any other person without restraint, interference, coercion, discrimination or reprisal from the elderly housing project or senior center;**

*Again, this could apply to Senior Centers and should be encouraged. A system for dealing with those grievances should also be transparent. It is a requirement in any programs that are funded through the Older American's Act and is simply good policy.*

**(8) Receive a copy of any rules or regulations of the elderly housing project or senior center.**

*This may be a bit onerous for some Centers, especially those with thousands of members and/or no registration process. Posting a copy of any rules or regulations and making them available upon request seems more practical.*

In its whole this Bill would be both difficult to interpret in a Senior Center setting and, frankly, a little meaningless. While we do not support this Bill as written, I want to go back to the intention of the Bill. As I have highlighted, some of the concepts do apply to Senior Centers and are good policy. We are encouraged that the need for ethical policies in Senior Centers was considered.

We recently completed a study of Senior Centers in Connecticut and will be releasing a report very soon. It provides a profile of Senior Centers and we hope to use it to start a conversation about our future. Issues like ethical policy development should be part of that conversation and we hope to be able to sit down with members of this committee very soon.

### **SB 620 – An Act Concerning a Plan to Encourage “Aging in Place”**

I will comment very briefly on this proposal. To be honest, I thought that the State had already studied what the Bill proposes in the Long Term Care Plan and that the Long Term Care Advisory Committee was still making recommendations.

But, I will take this opportunity to make a “plug”. When we talk about “aging in place” and how to encourage it, we cannot overlook the importance of quality programs and services delivered locally. That is what Senior Centers do. There is an incredible potential for Senior Centers to do more and to do it better. We provide a great deal of the

transportation that is available to community living older adults. We are the distribution sites for congregate and home delivered meals. We provide information, referral and assistance, wellness, fitness, recreation and social programs. There has not been a great deal of research about the impact of participating in Senior Centers but there is growing evidence that it has both health and quality of life benefits.

Perhaps we can engage in "an examination of enhanced Senior Center infrastructure and program delivery."

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on these Bills. I apologize that I could not deliver this testimony in person but would welcome an opportunity to answer any questions. I can be reached at (860) 665-8768 or by email at [dstone@newingtonct.gov](mailto:dstone@newingtonct.gov).