



A nonpartisan research and public policy office of the Connecticut General

Testimony of

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Human Services Committee

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Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to comment on two bills before you today.

As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is the nonpartisan state agency devoted to preparing Connecticut for a significantly changed demographic and enhancing the lives of the present and future generations of older adults. For seventeen 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. The Connecticut Commission on Aging stands ready to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services.

House Bill 5893: An Act Concerning Home and Community-Based Services for Persons with Acquired Brain Injury
~CoA informs

CoA serves as Co-Chair of the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee and understands the complexity of this issue and the need to not only provide Medicaid home and community-based services for those transitioning out of nursing homes but for those already in the community.

Attached you will find a graphical depiction of our current long-term care system. You will note that there are multiple waiver programs, serving individuals based on specific disease or age criteria. Most of these programs have a limited number of slots and many have waitlists, including the Acquired Brain Injury waiver, the subject of this bill.

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A group of experts has researched a variety of options for streamlining CT's system and has identified the 1915(i) State Plan Amendment as an ideal vehicle for restructuring. This option, which has been modified by the Affordable Care Act, would allow Connecticut to design a system that serves people based on need. We encourage this Committee to support a complete redesign of the long-term care system and in the meantime help the folks on the waiting lists for the various waivers.

House Bill 5434: An Act Concerning Processing of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applications

~CoA supports

SNAP (formerly food stamps) can provide significant assistance to low-income individuals and families to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and other food that they need. Through the use of a debit-card-type system – instead of the old-fashioned stamps – recipients can shop at most any grocery store in the state using these benefits. CoA applauds this Committee for addressing backlogs and errors in application processing.

In addition to the concerns addressed in this bill, CoA has identified a major gap in coverage in our state for older adults. As of September 2010, about 36,900 Connecticut residents aged 60+ receive food assistance through SNAP (according to DSS). **However, CoA estimates that another 70,000 older adults in CT are actually eligible for this federally-funded assistance.** Specifically, research shows that only about 34% of the older adults in Connecticut eligible for SNAP were actually enrolled in the program in 2006 (Mathematica). This is similar to national numbers. As a comparison, nationally, 67% of all individuals eligible for SNAP (regardless of age) were enrolled in the program.

As a result of this identification, CoA has been attending meetings of the SNAP Improvement Council to lend a voice to older adults' concerns and needs surrounding food. In addition, we talked to numerous senior center directors and other providers of direct services to determine why older adults are not signing up for SNAP. What we heard is that many older adults feel the benefit would likely be so low that applying is not worth the effort. However, the average benefit for single elderly SNAP enrollees in Connecticut was \$134/month in 2009. More than a quarter (28%) of elderly SNAP enrollees in CT received the maximum benefit that year of \$200/month for a one-person household (Mathematica).

The Elder Economic Security Initiative found that average monthly food costs for a single older adult in CT is \$234. SNAP could offset more than half, or even almost all, of the grocery costs in a month.

SNAP, as this Committee knows, is completely federally-funded. CoA recommends that any efforts to improve or expand the application processing capabilities for this program also target older adults. We can maximize federal funds, while mitigating a serious need among this population.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. CoA remains available to continue to work on this legislation as necessary throughout the process.