

Testimony of

Deb Polun, Legislative Director  
Connecticut Commission on Aging

Human Services Committee

March 17, 2011

### **In Support of Senate Bill 1145, An Act Concerning Outreach by Community Action Agencies for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applicants**

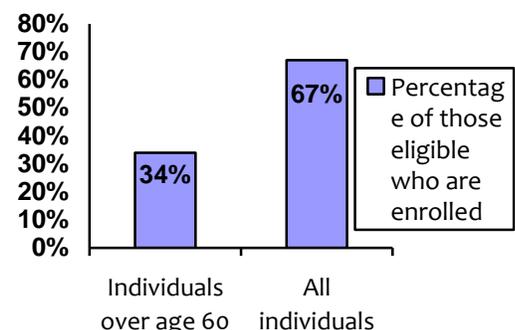
Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to comment today.

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.

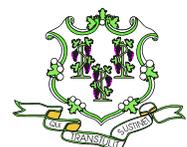
In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed. The Connecticut Commission on Aging stands ready to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services.

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 the backlogs and errors in application processing that rank Connecticut last in the country for this critical program.

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



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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 – a project of the CT Commission on Aging, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and WOW, Incorporated – 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. The Community Action Agencies are in a good position to assist in this endeavor, as they encounter thousands of older adults annually, when they process applications for energy assistance.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

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