TESTIMONY OF MAGGIE DRAG, OWNER OF EURO-AMERICAN CONNECTIONS, LLC IN OPPOSITION TO SB-330

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski and the rest of the Committee. Thank you for the time to testify on this important issue. My name is Maggie Drag, and I am the owner of Euro-American Connections, LLC, a home care registry located in Berlin, CT. I started Euro-American Connections in 1990. We are a home care registry that matches self-employed caregivers with elderly and disabled individuals looking for care at home or in senior and other facilities. In the past 22 years, we have placed over 5,000 caregivers with consumers.

Home care registries serve a critically important function in the care of seniors and people with disabilities. It allows caregivers who cannot, or do not want to, work for a facility or an employee-based home care agency, to find work with individuals needing care. It also allows seniors and people with disabilities to obtain care that may allow them to remain in their homes, but at a lower cost than employee-based agencies.

I started Euro-American Connections, soon after emigrating from Poland, primarily as a vehicle to help other new immigrants make some money while they were learning a new language, completing their education, raising families and acquiring the skills required to have a good life in America. These caregivers came from a culture of caregiving and worked hard to care for their clients. Today, we have caregivers from many parts of the world, including American-born caregivers, but we still attract caregivers that have a lot to give but are not willing or able to take jobs with facilities or employee-based home care agencies.

Over the past 20 years, I have seen countless examples of people who wanted to grow old in their homes, but were not able to afford the cost of employee-based agency care. I remember in the 1990's, a couple in their 80's from Portland, CT that came to me looking for care. The wife was bed-ridden, and the husband had been caring for her, but he needed a knee replacement. He had delayed the surgery for a long time, because he could not find a caregiver that he could afford. He told me that he could only afford $60 per day for a caregiver. It was very difficult to find a caregiver that would work for so little money, but I finally did it. Without a registry that would allow him to contract for care directly with a caregiver, he never could have found the care required for him to have his knee replaced.

Senate Bill 330 that you are considering today would kill the registry model of providing caregivers for our elderly and people with disabilities. Many people, like my couple from Portland, simply will not be able to pay the cost of obtaining care from employee-based agencies.

I am not coming to you as a registry owner that wants to protect what appears to be a competitive advantage over employee-based agencies that face higher operating costs. In addition to my home care registry, today I also own an employee-based homecare agency which provides a different level of care for individuals that can afford it. In our employee-based agency, the caregivers are our employees, and we pay for workers compensation, unemployment insurance and liability insurance, and we supervise our caregivers in the field. The cost to the

consumer is higher, and the employees in our employee-based agency receive these additional benefits, but they earn less than the caregivers that we place through our registry.

It's not that one business model is better than the other. The point is that both caregivers and consumers should have a choice. Consumers, who cannot afford a higher-priced employee-based agency, dearly need the less expensive registry model. Caregivers, who want or need more control over their schedule and the clients they accept, should have the right to chose to forego the protections of workers comp and unemployment insurance in exchange for higher wages.

The other critically important policy consideration for you is that if Senate Bill 330 kills the registry business model, consumers who cannot afford employee-based home care agencies will find home care services in the underground economy. These caregivers from Craig's list or other advertisements will not be subject to criminal background checks and will be much more likely to take advantage of seniors and people with disabilities. Also, they will be much less likely to pay federal or state income tax, since many of these arrangements will be based on cash transactions.

In conclusion, I implore you to not pass Senate Bill 330, and to keep the registry business model as a vital and economical solution for our state's seniors and people with disabilities. Thank you for allowing this time for me to testify.