Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.
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A CALL TO REJECT ELIMINATION OF THE COMMISSION ON AGING: H.B. 6350 SECTION 11

February 19, 2013

I am the founder and executive director of the Center for Medicare Advocacy. The Center is a private, non-profit organization headquartered in Mansfield, Connecticut and Washington, DC with offices throughout the country. In addition, I have recently been appointed to the national Commission on Long-term Care thanks to the nomination of the Connecticut Congressional delegation and Leader Nancy Pelosi.

The Center provides education and legal assistance to advance fair access to Medicare and quality healthcare. We represent older and disabled people throughout Connecticut respond to approximately 6,500 calls and emails annually, host two websites, and lead the National Medicare Advocates Alliance. The Center also provides written and electronic newsletters, myriad seminars, expert support for Connecticut's CHOICES program, and a vast array of other services on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries throughout Connecticut and the United States.

THE COMMISSION ON AGING IS UNIQUE AND CRITICALLY IMPORTANT TO THE STATE'S OLDER PEOPLE AND TO THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVE THEM

The Center for Medicare Advocacy has a longstanding and extremely productive working relationship with the Connecticut Commission on Aging (the Commission). The Commission provides effective education, advocacy and collaborative support on behalf of older people and for organizations that serve older people throughout the state. The services provided by the Commission are not duplicated by any other entity within or without government. When statewide public policy is being made, the Commission provides the voice for older people and

the eyes and ears for organizations that provide direct services for elders. Given the limited resources available to these organizations, none of them could be as effective without the Commission. In this respect the Commission is truly indispensable.

We are all keenly aware that the Connecticut population is aging. Indeed it is the seventh "oldest state" in the country. How many warnings have we heard about the "graying of the Baby Boomers" and the increasing age of people who are living with chronic conditions? As Baby Boomers are turning 65, we are experiencing a profound shift in our elderly population in terms of numbers, ethnicity, economic status, needs, and expectations. We must ensure that these demographics are considered when public policy is developed and when decisions are made about how to effectively meet these emerging social and economic trends.

This is not the time to eliminate the advocacy and education provided by the Commission on Aging. In fact, in the coming years the need for an independent Commission on Aging will be more important, not less, to the well-being of Connecticut's future, its families, and older people.

One of the most important things the Commission on Aging does is developing and leading alliances among the many individual organizations that serve Connecticut's older people. The Commission's smart and generous leadership dramatically enhances the effectiveness of each organization while also helping us speak in a cohesive voice on behalf of Connecticut's older citizens. For example, the Connecticut Elder Action Network (CEAN) is a coalition of over eighty Connecticut elder advocacy organizations which exists due to the efforts of the Commission on Aging.

As the Center's executive director, I serve on CEAN's Executive Committee. The organizations that belong to CEAN share information, expertise, and resources in order to develop and advance a responsible public policy agenda for all older people throughout Connecticut. The Commission on Aging founded CEAN, administers its efforts, keeps members abreast of statewide issues,

leads the disparate member organizations to develop annual priorities, and guides us in implementing effective education and advocacy for and on behalf of older people. With the Commission's expert assistance, CEAN and its member organizations have been able to actively participate in public policy discussions and to educate other organizations and older Connecticut residents about legislative debates and outcomes. None of us could do this on our own. CEAN and the Commission's work with CEAN have also helped member organizations develop important relationships and knowledge of one another's work; this in turn helps all of the organizations serve their clientele more effectively.

THE CREATION OF THE DEPARTMENT ON AGING DOES NOT NEGATE THE NEED FOR THE COMMISSION ON AGING

The newly created state Department on Aging (SDA), in contrast to the Commission on Aging, administers the State's programs and services that assist older adults, such as CHOICES and the Elderly Nutrition Programs. The Center for Medicare Advocacy serves as the lead training and legal support entity for the CHOICES program. SDA personnel administer the statewide CHOICES program carefully and with commitment, as they do the other programs in their purview.

The fact that these fine staff members are now part of a Department on Aging, rather than the Unit on Aging in the Department of Social Services, does not diminish the need for the Commission on Aging. SDA and the Commission on Aging have two very distinct roles. **SDA does not, and is not intended to, serve as an independent watchdog and educator for Connecticut's older people. On the other hand, this is the Commission's mission.** The entities work together to accomplish as much as possible for older people with the resources that are available.

The Commission on Aging also serves as an important analytical resource center. It monitors the status of Connecticut's older population, assesses the impact of current and proposed initiatives on this population, conducts activities that advance their interests, and reports to the Governor

and the Legislature. The Commission and the information that it gleans through its activities have been, and should continue to be, valuable resources to the Legislature and Governor and to the development of sound public policy.

The Connecticut Commission on Aging represents a commitment to the citizens of Connecticut that the well-being of older adults will continue to be a significant concern to the State. The Commission is the only Connecticut entity solely devoted to advancing the needs of older people when state policies and legislation are debated and decided.

Without the Commission, older people's needs and perspective could easily be forgotten when policy and fiscal decisions are made. Often more frail and less able to speak for themselves than their younger counterparts, older people's interests could quickly fade into the background without the Commission on Aging. This is particularly true in difficult financial times such as these. Indeed, the proposal to eliminate the Commission on Aging is an example of that: While I strongly oppose the consolidation of all the watchdog commissions, only the Commission on Aging is slated for elimination.

CONCLUSION

The Center for Medicare Advocacy urges the Legislature to reject the Governor's call to abolish the Commission on Aging. I am available to do anything we can to help.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,
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Executive Director