STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE DEPARTMENT ON AGING

LONG TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM
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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING

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TESTIMONY OF NANCY SHAFFER, STATE OMBUDSMAN

Good evening Senator Hart and Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Nancy Shaffer and I am the State Long Term Care Ombudsman. The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program is mandated by the Older American's Act and Connecticut General Statutes 17b-400 through 17b-406 to provide services to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of residents of long term care facilities. As the State Ombudsman it is my responsibility to facilitate public comment and represent the interests of residents in order to recommend changes to the laws, regulations, policies and actions which affect residents' quality of life and care. As State Ombudsman I serve as a member of the Long Term Care Advisory Council, the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee and I am a member of the CT Elder Action Network (CEAN). The State Ombudsman has an independent voice at each of these tables as the result of the foresight and wisdom of the founders of the Ombudsman Program and the authors of the Older American's Act. Effective January 1, 2013, the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program is now under the umbrella administration of the newly created State Department on Aging. Today I testify before this Committee in regards to a proposal contained in Governor Malloy's biennium budget.

The FY 2014-FY 2015 Biennium Governor's Budget states **"The Commission on Aging is recommended for elimination as a result of the creation of the State Department on Aging in the Governor's budget as part of his proposal to restructure and transform state government."**

As you know, the Commission on Aging (CoA) was created in 1993 as an independent, non-partisan, public policy agency within state government for older adults. I respectfully submit that the rationale to eliminate the CoA because of the new Department on Aging is flawed and not in the best interest of Connecticuts' residents. Both the State Unit on Aging (SUA) and the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP), which now comprise the State Department on Aging, have vastly different missions and functions than that of the CoA. These two entities provide programs and assistance to Connecticut residents. In the case of the LTCOP, the

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mandate is to provide advocacy and assistance to individuals residing in certain institutions; nursing homes, residential care homes and assisted living facilities. On the other hand, the CoA functions as a public policy and research entity serving all of CT's aging population. Over the years, all three entities have co-existed and functioned independently though collaboratively with one another, each carrying out its specific mandate. The role of the CoA is to promote public policy for all of CT's aging individuals. The CoA monitors and researches a multitude of complex issues facing our aging population. The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program addresses individual complaints of long term care residents. Ombudsmen go to the institutions, provide direct intervention and resolution services for the resident. The concurrent role of the Ombudsman Program is to inform systemic changes in policy and legislation which will benefit long term care residents. The LTCOP has a very focused purpose and mandate as you can see. The CoA does not provide direct services but is a research and policy driven agency. These are completely different roles than the Executive Branch Agencies.

It is difficult to understand the rationale to eliminate the Commission on Aging when considering its principal role in informing and shaping policy for Connecticut's dramatically aging demographic. The significant leadership of the CoA and the partnerships it has created are of great value to the State and its residents. The State and its residents are beneficiary of the CoA's efforts to rebalance CT's long term care systems and improve quality of life through sound policy development. Specifically the Money Follows the Person (MFP) Program, the Workforce Development strategic plan and the Livable Communities initiative are all efforts in which the Commission on Aging is a key participant. While saving the State millions of dollars and leveraging federal dollars for the State, these initiatives address the State's commitment to providing individuals the opportunity to reside in the least restrictive setting of their choice. The CoA recently chaired and provided substantial support to the legislatively mandated Aging in Place Task Force, resulting in a variety of important legislative proposals to prepare CT for its future. It is not in the State's best interest to eliminate the Commission on Aging and lose those significant and unduplicated contributions. The relative cost to the State, three full-time employees, is far outweighed by the savings achieved by the work of this Commission.

On behalf of the 30,000 residents in Connecticut's skilled nursing facilities, residential care homes and managed residential communities, I am honored to serve as the State Ombudsman. I look forward to working with the many State partners and stakeholders, including the Commission on Aging, in improving the quality of care and services for all of our residents.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.

Nancy Shaffer, M.A.

State Ombudsman