CT General Assembly Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

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Testimony of Joseph A. Luciano
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Testimony in Support of Connecticut's Legislative Commission on Aging—In Opposition to Eliminating the Commission: Bill No. 6350

Esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Legislative Commission on Aging (CoA).

I will be brief.

I am both an older adult and a person with disabilities. As such, I am appalled, perhaps even more than the average Connecticut resident, at Governor Malloy's recommendation to eliminate the Connecticut Commission on Aging. It is astounding to consider that the governor is recommending the elimination of one of the state's smallest (three professional staff), yet most efficient, cost-effective and successful agencies. Size belies its impact, for it is efficient, successful, and therefore valuable to all Connecticut persons with disabilities. Its staff has been extremely supportive of me, personally, and the Commission is leading Connecticut's efforts to make all of its communities "livable." This initiative is, of course, extremely important to me, personally, and to the tens of thousands of Connecticut residents, of all ages, who have disabilities.

To verify the Commission's value to our state, I recommend that you scan the CoA's most recent "Results-Based Accountability" report. There is no "fluff," in this report, no grandiose statements unsupported by the facts. There is only documentation of hard work, concrete results and recommendations that deliver fiscally responsible solutions to complex issues that affect hundreds of thousands of residents—including you and me.

It is perhaps unnecessary for me to remind you—though I feel it is important to do so—that the CoA is your resource—the General Assembly's expert-- on all issues affecting our senior citizens and people with disabilities. The staff, supported by a 17-member, unpaid volunteer board from across Connecticut, provides non-partisan, objective research and public policy expertise and hands-on, professional support to some of your most important legislative task forces and committees—again I refer you to the CoA's Results-Based Accountability Report.

As rationale for eliminating the CoA, the governor has cited the Jan. 1 re-establishment of the state Department on Aging—an Executive Branch agency-- apparently inferring that the CoA's work is somehow now redundant. This rationale is at best naïve and at worst, I fear, disingenuous. There is no redundancy. The CoA is an office of the General Assembly.

As such, it is enjoys independent oversight and autonomy over Executive Branch programs, budgets and policies and provides you with the information you need to make sound, informed decisions. The General Assembly, in its wisdom, created the CoA in this fashion in 1993 and has been well served ever since. Discussion of whether the state needs a new Executive Branch agency such as the Department on Aging with its added expense and attendant organizational problems is perhaps better left to another time—but I believe worth exploring.

Since its creation by the General Assembly 20 years ago, the CoA has been responsible for helping to shape the direction of aging policy in our state and preparing it for the "silver tsunami" of older-adult population growth now well under way. Connecticut is the 7th "oldest" state in the nation. We are home to one-million Baby Boomers—nearly one-third our entire population.

Between 2006 and 2030, the CoA estimates the population of people 65 and over—including me and most of you—will have grown by 64 percent. I ask you, what other segment of our population will have more of an impact on our state? As the CoA has informed you many times, Connecticut spends more than $2 billion every year on long-term care services and supports that provide critical services to older adults and people with disabilities.

Ensuring that this huge portion of our state budget is spent wisely and effectively is imperative, and the CoA has provided you with strategies and recommendations that can save our state nearly $1 billion every year. I remind you that this agency has a staff of only three professionals. Its total budget is around $240,000. As the Legislature's "numbers committee," you know that this budget hardly registers as even a miniscule percentage of the state's total outlay, yet the CoA delivers many times more than it costs in terms of solid recommendations, concrete strategies to save taxpayers' money and world-class research.

In closing, I urge you, in the strongest terms possible, to reject the governor's unsound and, frankly, uninformed recommendation to eliminate your resource on aging issues.

Finally, I am a grateful participant in the state's Money Follows the Person program. As you know, this program—which has been praised by Gov. Malloy—allows older adults and people of all ages with disabilities to live at home and in our communities rather than in institutions. This is most certainly a better outcome for people and for the state budget—to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars in Medicaid cost-avoidance and savings.

Through its objective research and expertise, the Legislative Commission on Aging was an architect for the launch of MFP in Connecticut (I must wonder if the governor acknowledges this fact) and continues to lead federally mandated committees including the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee and its Workforce Development Subcommittee. This is just one example of the value the CoA brings to our state.

I implore you to ensure that the CoA is allowed to continue its important work on behalf of the people of Connecticut.

Thank you.

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