



**Appropriations Committee
March 22, 2013**

**Testimony of Julia Evans Starr, Executive Director
Commission on Aging**

HB 6354, ~ RE: Legislative Commission on Aging

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Miner, esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Julie Evans Starr and I am the Executive Director of the Commission on Aging (CoA). I appreciate the opportunity to present today. I am also thankful for your support of the Commission on Aging over the past several years and ask for your continued support of this important agency. **As you know, the Governor has proposed to eliminate the Commission on Aging and merge the other five Legislative Commissions. We are strongly opposed to both of these proposals, but will focus our comments on the CoA.**

Since the release of this proposal, colleagues, stakeholders and residents across the state have voiced their strong opposition to it in a variety of ways: In the Appropriations Committee hearing on the Governor's budget last month – over 30 stakeholders ~ representing scores of constituents ~ submitted written and/or gave verbal testimony (people like: Attorney Judith Stein a national leader on Medicare); letters to the editor have appeared across the state (eg CT Post, the New Haven Register, the Darien Times, the Middletown Patch to name a few) and we have heard from many people that they have reached out to their own legislators to voice their opposition to this proposal.

Still, in the face of these exceptionally challenging times, fiscal and otherwise, we, at the Commission on Aging, have been unwavering in our dedication and innovation ~ we remain part of the solution! This session alone we have tracked over 250 pieces of legislation and provided our comprehensive tracking tool on a weekly basis with legislators and partners. We have testified to dozens of important bills and worked with legislators and legislative staff to analyze and explain various legislative proposals. Additionally, legislators have introduced several pieces of legislation that call upon (mandate) the CoA take on additional responsibilities – studies, new initiatives, task forces etc. This legislation would otherwise perhaps not get passed (do to the assignment of a fiscal note) or if passed would be charged to highly paid consultants. Just this week we have been asked to partner on a new grant opportunity per request of an executive branch state agency and a nonprofit. We have also continued our ongoing consultation with the Governor's rebalancing work. We are also planning a second livable communities/aging in place forum for next month. This represents continued work and a follow up to the forum held earlier in the year attended by over 80 municipalities, 30 legislators and 150+ stakeholders.

**CoA leads or actively
participates as a member
of the following
partnerships:**

Co-Chair - Money Follows the
Person Steering Committee,
Chair: Workforce
Development Subcommittee

Co-Chair and Manager
LTC Advisory Council:
CGS §17b-338

Low Income Energy Advisory
Board: CGS §16a-41b

Legislative staff
Grandparents Visitation
Rights Task Force (SA 11-12,
PA 12-137)

Legislative Staff & Member
Aging in Place task Force
(SA 12-6, SB 886)

Medical Assistance Program
Oversight Council: CGS §17b-
28 and Complex Care
Committee

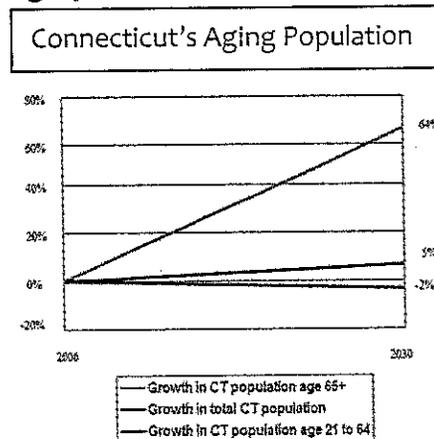
Chair & Manager, CT Elder
Action Network (CEAN)

And more...

Why are a variety of people inside and outside state government still looking for our leadership? With the Commission you benefit from over 20 years of experience, hard work, partnerships, high credibility, without a lot of fanfare ~ you get results. Through our work we analyze demographic trends, maximize state and federal funds, work across branches of state government, identify greater efficiencies within state government, lead cutting-edge research, identify and promote national trends and best practices and bring accountability to state government. These all add up to tangible, measurable results. In other words, we represent the very best of state government.

DEMOGRAPHICS: CoA Prepares CT for an Aging and Long- Lived Demographic:

The CoA brings dedicated focus and objective direction based in large part on demographic trends. Connecticut is the 7th oldest state in the nation. Demographics indicate that our population of older adults will explode in the next twenty years. From 2006 to 2030 our 65+ population will increase by 64%. The oldest of the baby boomer generation (those born between 1946-1964) have already begun turning 67 years of age. The whole of the boomer generation – almost 1 million strong in CT – will follow suit. Additionally, people are living longer. As our older population grows and experiences unprecedented longevity, it will impact nearly every facet of society– and state government is no exception. State Medicaid budgets, other safety net programs and families are strained at a time when the recession challenges the reliance on pensions and home equity. Though people on Medicaid using long-term services and supports (LTSS) only comprise 7% of the Medicaid population, they utilize 61% of the expenditures. Proactively, the CoA works with the CGA, policymakers on all levels and diverse stakeholders to meet these challenges, prioritize funding and prepare for our state’s graying future. *Simply said, the aging of CT is an issue that affects us all – it’s our grandparents, our parents, ourselves.*



CoA is a LEGISLATIVE OFFICE and NOT an EXECUTIVE BRANCH AGENCY: There is profound concern among the aging community that older adults have been discriminated against with this new proposal. The rationale for the elimination is that now there is an executive branch Department on Aging. By way of background, the State Department on Aging (SDA) takes the existing 28 employees, the existing funds and the existing programs of the State Unit on Aging, including the LTC Ombudsman Program (presently at the Department of Social Services) and moves them into a new Department (to remain located at DSS). The Governor’s budget allows for a Commissioner and an administrative assistant. The State Unit on Aging– now the SDA– administers programs and services (e.g. the Elderly Nutrition Program) off of the Executive Branch. The CoA is an objective, nonpartisan office off of the Legislative Branch. For the past 20 years we have co-existed with DSS— each with its own, distinct role.

The work of the Legislative CoA would continue to cut across several Executive Branch agencies that have aging-related programs. Major aging-related programs will remain at the Department of Social Services (and outside of the SDA), including the CT Home Care Program for Elders, Rebalancing Initiatives including Money Follows the Person, the Medicaid MME initiative... Again, Executive Branch agencies (such as DPH, DMHAS, DSS, DCF) administer programs and services, report to the Governor and carry a Governor’s agenda! The Legislative Commissions, namely the CoA, work directly with the Legislature to provide the necessary checks and balances within state government.

To illustrate the perimeters of Executive Branch agencies: Countless colleagues from various state agencies (including the new Dept. on Aging, DSS, DMHAS, DPH) would like to publicly express their support for the Legislative Commission on Aging. They recognize our important role within state government. However, they are unable to do so as Executive Branch employees. It would be counter to the Governor’s direction.

CoA's ROLE AS LEGISLATIVE STAFF (specific examples):

- **Grandparents Visitation Rights** – As mandated by SA 11-12, the Legislative CoA provided administrative staff support for the Grandparents' Visitation Rights Task Force. Over 200 hours of staff time went into providing this support to the Task Force. Far too often it isn't acknowledged how much staff support goes into helping a task force be effective in its work. Tasks include but are not limited to: working with appointing authorities to get members appointed, working with the co-chairs to develop timelines and providing background on the issue, identifying experts to present, writing the report, advising on the bill that comes out of the report, raising awareness about the bill to interested parties and providing testimony on the bill. The Grandparents' Visitation Rights Task Force submitted its report to the CGA on February 1, 2012. As a result of the task force's work, the Governor signed PA 12-137: An Act Concerning Visitation Rights for Grandparents and Other Persons on the Grandparents' Visitation Rights bill, on June 15, 2012.

- **Aging in Place Task Force:** As mandated by SA 12-6, the Legislative CoA served as a member and as administrative staff to the Aging in Place Task Force. Similar to the tasks described above, CoA staff provided significant amounts of research and background information to task force members, worked with the Legislative co-chairs to arrange for and to prepare a dozen experts to speak to the task force, drafted a final report and submitted it to the CGA. The culmination of this work resulted in the crafting of legislation this session, SB 886: An Act Concerning Aging in Place.

80% of Connecticut residents expect to stay in their homes and communities as they age.

- **In the 2013 Session, legislators are calling upon the Commission's additional expertise** through the introduction of at least two bills. The pieces of legislation would require the Legislative CoA to study and report to the CGA on various issues at no additional cost to the state. HB 5762: An Act Concerning a Study of Funding and Support for Home- and Community-Based Care for the Elderly and Alzheimer's Patients and HB 6396: An Act Concerning Livable Communities.
- **Bill tracking tool:** The legislative CoA tracks hundreds of bills and proposals each session and distributes a bill tracking tool to legislators, legislative staff and the aging network of stakeholders.
- **Constituent Work for Legislators:** The Legislative CoA is often called on by legislative staff to provide information and support on constituent matters. We have fielded hundreds of phone calls from constituents and legislative staff this year alone. Additionally, we participate, across the state, in senior fairs hosted by legislators and we provide support to legislative staff in providing ideas for and preparation of aging-related topics for newsletters in their district.

CoA's WORK YIELDS SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS: Maximizes State and Federal Funds/ Partners with the Philanthropic Community: Undeniably, the CoA's vigilance has brought into the state millions of dollars. We continually analyze and identify opportunities to maximize state and federal funding. In our work to explore and review the Affordable Care Act (national health care reform), we have vetted, recommended and strongly encouraged the Executive Branch to pursue several initiatives that generate enhanced revenues for our state.

CoA's expertise, vigilance and reach across branches of government helps secure and maximize federal funds. These funds do not go into the CoA budget, but rather back into the State budget and will in part be used to transform and streamline CT's long-term services and supports system.

Policymakers can't be expected to know about every complex federal funding opportunity or the distinct nuances of every aging-related issue, initiative or program – rather, we are that expert resource for YOU. We identify concrete ways the state can improve efficiency, save money, and actually help the constituency.

Again, these identifiable savings, however, do not go into the CoA budget. As a matter of fact, any fundraising or expectation of fundraising to support the Commission would be ill-advised – as 65% of dollars raised would go to the Comptroller's office for fringe benefits.

I would assert – during tough fiscal times – that revenue-generating entities and skillful problem-solvers should not be eliminated, minimized through reduced funding or ill-conceived consolidation. Instead, they should be incentivized or rewarded – or at least funded adequately to maximize their effectiveness. In other words, if the further reduction is being proposed in an attempt to save money – it simply won't... quite the contrary!

CoA Looks at the Big Picture and Works on Major Systems Change: CoA devotes significant energy and provides critical leadership in the area of long-term services and supports, which represents over \$2 billion, or 13%, of the state budget. Using research, the CoA has developed and pursued a series of policy proposals that honor the U.S. Supreme Court Olmstead Decision, CT state law (CGS §17b-337), meaningfully streamline state government, and potentially save Connecticut up to \$900 million each year. Additionally, these proposals increase choice in how and where people of all ages receive care, thereby enhancing their quality of life. Ironically, we are pleased to see that Governor Malloy has recommended many of these proposals in his budget, including proposals about modernizing nursing homes, expanding and enhancing Money Follows the Person and tackling the direct care workforce.

The CoA utilizes multiple approaches to turn the curve on long-term care (LTC) reform. In addition to our policy proposals, we also lead major collaborations such as Co-chair of the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee (a \$200 million+ federal demonstration program) and Co-Chair and manager of the legislatively mandated LTC Advisory Council. We fully informed countless high profile reports including The Governor's 2013 Rebalancing Plan, CBIA's 21st Century Institute Report on LTC and the State LTC Plan. On a weekly basis, we are called by a half-dozen reporters to help inform newspaper articles, etc. Our leadership represents rebalancing in action.

Additionally, it is important to note that the state often pays consultants millions of dollars for work that the Commission has informed and at times produced. An example of this is our work as the Chair of the MFP Workforce Development Subcommittee and our LTSS website. In this way as well, we save the state significant money.

To illustrate the CoA's role in bringing accountability to state government: The Legislative Commission on Aging recognized a huge service delivery barrier in delays in processing eligibility of Medicaid Long-term Services and Supports. We then worked with its stakeholders, gathered necessary information and data, and led a series of meetings with the DSS Commissioner Bremby.

CoA Develops Workforce / Jobs: As chair of the MFP workforce development subcommittee, we have developed a 5-year strategic plan to address the needs of the workforce infrastructure. It is estimated that in the next five years the home- and community- based infrastructure will need an additional 9,000 jobs. As a leader in statewide planning efforts, CoA continues to work with state agencies, community partners, workforce investment boards and various other stakeholders to recruit, retain and train thousands of workers for careers in the home- and community- based care field. The recommendations articulated in the workforce development plan, **produced by the Commission on Aging** for the MFP Workforce Subcommittee, are now being implemented through MFP and the Governor's high-profile "Rebalancing Plan" that he announced late January.

CoA is a Highly Efficient State Agency: To accomplish our work with maximum efficiency, we have always pursued creative means to achieve our results. In illustration, the CoA:

- shares resources with our neighbors at the Capitol – including the African American Affairs Commission (e.g. including supplies, copier, fax machine, space, etc.)
- has associations with the UConn School of Social Work, Yale School of Public Health, UConn Law School, and enlists interns and research volunteers;
- has working relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders including: the philanthropy community, the providers, consumers, and the business community, from your districts and across the state;
- benefits from our board members from across the state. (Here's a snapshot of a few of our members: The chief of geriatrics at Yale/St. Raphael Hospital in New Haven, several heads of municipal departments on elderly and senior centers, a retired business attorney/ an executive of major corporations)
- represents a model for RBA. Through the wisdom of the CGA, PA 09-7 embedded RBA into the state statutes of the Commissions. We applaud this committee's data-driven decision-making utilizing RBA and look forward to continuing our collaboration with this committee.

Putting the CoA Budget into Perspective: To put the CoA's budget into perspective, it represents .0001% of the entire state budget. In relation to other Legislative Commissions, though sharing identical statutes, we are one of the smaller ones from a number of staff and budget glance. The CoA maximizes its limited funding as the vast majority of our funds go towards Personal Services for our professional staff of three (now budgeted for 2.9 FTE staff, including me). The CoA staff represents 3 (budgeted for 2.9 FTE) of the State's roughly 57,000 executive branch employees/600 legislative branch employees.

The CoA budget is lean. Volunteer reimbursements, travel, printed materials, etc. are all long gone. We respectfully ask that you predicate your support for the CoA based on the caliber of our work as illustrated in our RBA reports. Furthermore, if you would need additional information I would gladly share with you a highly comprehensive Executive Director's Report that I submit each month to the board.

As a reminder: As you know, in recent years PA 09-3 (and the governor's holdback reductions) cut the already lean CoA budget by 55%. Actually, all the legislative Commissions were cut by roughly the same percentage. In other words, we were ahead of the curve in our shared sacrifice. Responsibly, the CoA made the necessary adjustments to further streamline our operations and tackle our mandate with laser-like focus. Our best option was to significantly reduce salaries/staff schedules (20-50%). This budget reduction led to the eventual loss of a valued staff member.

In Closing: Through our ongoing collaboration, it becomes clear, the highly complex and multi-faceted aging-related issues the CoA is tackling helps "turn the curve".

By supporting the Legislative Commission on Aging you affirm that you hold in high value the quality of life for present and future older adults in our state, that you understand the seriousness and complexity of our graying state and that you hold in high regard accountability, performance and results in state government.

Thank you for supporting the CoA and the other Legislative Commissions.