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Testimony to the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

In Opposition to HB6354 Section 90, Governor's Budget Proposal

Esteemed Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Sergio Rodriguez and I am serving my fifth term as a member of the New Haven Board of Aldermen, representing the 26th Ward. Prior to my service as an alderman, I was the Substance Abuse Coordinator for the City of New Haven. I have more than 30 years of experience in human services and I am proud to say that my wife Randi and I have, over the years, provided a loving home for more than 50 children referred by the State Department of Children and Families.

With these experiences as background, I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to the Appropriations Committee regarding the Governor's recommendation to eliminate the state Commission on Aging and to consolidate the other five legislative commissions. These commissions represent diverse segments of our Connecticut society including the Latino and Puerto Rican community, Children, Women, African Americans and Asian Pacific Americans; all of which also represent the seniors who live in our communities.

While I believe both recommendations are entirely inappropriate, I find it particularly offensive that the governor would consider eliminating the Commission on Aging. This is the Legislature's—your own--non-partisan, independent research and public policy agency for all issues affecting Connecticut's soaring population of older adults. We are, after all, the 7th oldest state in the nation.

Here is a small, flexible and cost-effective Commission created by the General Assembly 20 years ago. Every year, as mandated by the General Assembly, the Commission produces a Results-Based Accountability and Performance report card that clearly and without exaggeration details the value of its work to you and to our state at large. If you have not yet had the opportunity to review the Commission's 2012 report, I highly recommended that you do so.

In his proposal to eliminate the Commission on Aging, the governor points to the re-establishment of the state Department on Aging, which as you know is an *Executive Branch* agency that reports to him. He infers that the Commission on Aging—which reports to you and the people of Connecticut-- is somehow redundant. This rationale simply makes no sense.

Those who know the difference between Executive Branch and Legislative Branch agencies understand that there is no redundancy.

As an independent agency of the General Assembly, the Commission provides oversight over Executive Branch programs, budgets and policies. Its autonomy enables it to provide members of the General Assembly—including each of you--with the objective, evidence-based information you need to make important decisions that affect your (and my) constituents' well-being and the state's fiscal health.

Here are just some of the ways I believe the Commission on Aging continues to serve our state:

--The Commission is the only office in state government responsible for studying and providing research on all matters concerning our growing and diverse population of older adults.

--The Commission studies and monitors complex issues that affect a million Connecticut baby boomers, older adults and persons of all ages with disabilities.

--With only three professional staff (supported by a 21-member, unpaid, volunteer Board from throughout the state), the Commission is an extremely low-cost legislative office that provides oversight, checks and balances which are critical to state government.

--Support of the Legislature's Commission on Aging affirms the distinct roles and authority of the Legislative and Executive branches of government.

--The Commission on Aging saves the state money. Through its work, the Commission—whose total budget is only $250,000 or .00001% of the state budget-- and the other Legislative Commissions have brought millions of dollars into the state—far more than their costs.

I could say much more about the effectiveness and efficacy of the Commission on Aging's work and its value to the Legislature, our state and its people. Again, I would suggest that a review of the Commission's Results-Based Accountability Report and Performance Report Card clearly reveals the value of this agency.

In closing, I would ask you to please reject the Governor's recommendation and enable the Commission on Aging to continue its critically important work.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted

Sergio Rodriguez

Hon. Sergio Rodriguez
Ward 26, Alderman