Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
2/19/2012

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HB 6350, Section 11 - OPPOSE

I am writing today to testify in OPPOSITION to the proposal to eliminate the CT Commission on Aging.

Our senior center in East Hartford had an issue. Someone wanted a copy of their membership list, a list that included contact information for some of the most vulnerable older adults in the city. I sought the advice of our City Attorney and was advised that, under Freedom of Information law, I had to release the information. That did not sit well. I got in touch with a colleague in another Town and we contacted our State Unit on Aging, then a Division of the Department of Social Services, now the Department on Aging. They could not provide any assistance. As an executive branch office, they are not in a position to interpret state law nor to change it. And, as municipal employees, neither were we. This was not an issue that any municipality could take on. Thankfully, we have a Commission on Aging. We brought the issue to them. They researched, consulted, coached and responded. They brought the issue to the Committee on Aging and provided support to both the legislature and to us as a bill was introduced and shepherded through the legislative process until the Governor signed the law exempting the names and contact information of participants of senior centers from the Freedom of Information law.

Could this have happened without the CoA? NO! In the scope of issues that this legislature considers, in the context of the complete General Statutes, this was an incredibly small issue. In the context of municipal issues, it is not that large. As important as we saw it, it would have been lost without the Commission which not only has the expertise but also the deep understanding of the needs and concerns of older adults and those that serve them.

The State Unit on Aging, under any name, could not help in this matter and cannot do what the Commission on Aging has done so well. The Department of Aging and the Commission on Aging are not interchangeable. We need the Commission.