Testimony to the General Assembly's Appropriations Committee
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In support of the Connecticut Commission on Aging

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Older adult member volunteer of the CT Legislative Commission on Aging:
Testimony In Opposition to Bill No. 6354 Section 90

I appreciate the opportunity to present my views today.

On all matters concerning the growing population of older adults in Connecticut, the Legislative Commission on Aging serves as the nonpartisan public policy and research office of the General Assembly.

The Commission provides legislative research and testimony, serves as expert staff to the legislature on key specific policy matters, provides leadership among stakeholders, promotes sound policy initiatives and reviews and comments on state departmental policies, procedures, structures and outcomes that affect older adults and persons with disabilities.

It does all this—and much more—with a three-person professional staff located on the fifth floor of the Capitol, supported by a 21-member, unpaid volunteer board from communities throughout Connecticut. Its annual budget is about $240,000. As a retired financial executive I'm tempted to add that this budget is so small that it hardly registers as a percentage of the state's overall budget. But rather than focus on the budget, I believe it's more productive to discuss the value the Commission on Aging brings to you and our state.

In carrying out its statutory mandate, the Commission cultivates and maintains extensive relationships with public and private service providers to, advocates for, and consumers within the older adult community. This is a community whose diverse population is soaring. We are, in fact, the seventh oldest state in the nation.

Unlike the aging- related relevant Executive branch agencies with which the Commission on Aging has strong working relationships, the Commission does not administer or provide direct services. Doing so would conflict with the role the Legislative Commission on Aging plays in seeking to balance the policy objectives of the legislature with the operational objectives of the Executive branch. This was the unique role wisely envisioned by the General Assembly when it created the Commission in 1993.

The Governor's proposed budget for fiscal 2014- 2015 calls for the elimination of the Commission on Aging on the grounds that it would be redundant with the newly created Department on Aging which provides and administers programs and services, primarily care and support- related, for the older adult community.

How could it be redundant, since the Legislative Commission on Aging, by mandate, is focused upon creating and implementing sound policy and the new Department on Aging is focused upon running sound programs and services? It is overreach-- and a conflict of interest-- for the Executive branch to propose depriving the General Assembly of the internal policy formulating eyes and ears provided by the Commission on Aging.

The administration of programs and delivery of services for the care- dependent older adult population is fragmented, the cost burden is enormous, and the state is dealing with antiquated information systems. The emphasis is and has been on thoughtfully shifting, where appropriate, the load to less expensive home- and community-based care settings where most recipients of services would rather be anyway. The Legislative Commission on Aging, through extensive committee and council memberships, provides extensive leadership among stakeholders in this arena.

Do not be misled into fixing (consolidating) or eliminating the legislative Commission on Aging which is not broken as attested by its 2012 Results- Based Accountability Report and Performance Report Card and by extensive support from the stakeholders.

Please strongly support the Legislative Commission on Aging that is and has been effectively collaborating on fixing the state- administered Medicaid (and to a lesser extent Medicare) delivery system that is fragmented and broken and represents a growing 2 billion dollars of the State's 20- billion dollar annual budget.

In summary, the Legislature cannot afford to be without its smoothly functioning, cost- effective, Legislative Commission on Aging regardless of what course the Governor and Executive branch undertakes with the new Department on Aging.

Thank you.