Appropriations Committee Testimony 3/22/13

In OPPOSITION to the elimination of Commission on Aging
RE: HB 6354 Section 90- OPPOSE

By Ray Guenter, West Hartford Resident

My name is Ray Guenter. I have been a member of the Commission on Aging (CoA) for more than five years and a resident of the State of Connecticut since 1976.

I again strongly urge the Appropriations Committee to reject the Governor's proposal to eliminate the Commission on Aging and continue funding the COA at a level which will allow it to continue to provide its indispensable service to the Legislature and the elder population of the State of Connecticut. Eliminating the COA would be a grave mistake because:

1. **There is no duplication of function between the recently created Department on Aging and the COA. The assertion to the contrary in the Governor's budget document is simply wrong.** The COA is a legislative commission, an instrument of the Legislature designed to serve as the independent voice of the State's elderly population. COA's statutory function is to study and provide research on all matters concerning the growing population of older adults in CT. It serves as a nonpartisan, public policy and research office of the Legislature and as a staff resource to the Legislature. It is a leader in the field of elder issues and as a catalyst for data-driven policy change. Unlike Executive branch agencies like the Department on Aging, COA does not administer or provide direct services. If it did so, this would present a conflict with COA's mission of providing independent policy assessments and objective support for the legislative process.

The Department on Aging, on the other hand, has responsibility for administering the programs and services provided by the Elderly Services Division with the Long Term Care Ombudsman program, both formerly housed in DSS. There are many other programs within State government that affect the elderly that are not housed within the DOA but which fall within the COA's mandate. The DOA, as a branch of the Executive Department, cannot be expected to provide objective assessment of the programs for the elderly that it and other branches of the Executive Department are changed with administering.

Clearly the scope and nature of the responsibilities of the COA and the DOA are entirely different. Neither could or should perform the duties of the other. There is no duplication.

2. The Governor's attempt to eliminate the COA, a legislative commission, is an unwarranted and inappropriate intrusion into the workings of the Legislature. The Legislature has determined that a legislative Commission on Aging is necessary for **IT** to effectively perform its duties with respect to legislation relating to the State's older population. It is no more appropriate for the Governor to dictate to the Legislature what instruments it uses to accomplish its tasks than it would be for the Legislature to dictate the identity and function of the staff and advisors that the Governor choses to assist him in the performance of his duties.

3. **As the State gets older and balancing its budget becomes harder, it needs the COA more.** Connecticut's demographics make it clear that the importance of the COA grows day-by-day. That is because the number of elderly Connecticut residents and their percentage of the general population are growing inexorably. From 2006-2030, the older adult population will increase by 64%. At the same time people are experiencing unprecedented longevity. These facts will inevitably be reflected in the amount of the State budget allocated to programs for the elderly.

Connecticut, like all states, depends significantly on federal funds to support its programs for the elderly. The rules for obtaining federal funds and the rules that govern how they may be utilized are complex and unforgiving. The staff of the COA has a thorough understanding of these rules and how they apply to Connecticut's programs for the elderly. Recently, the COA ~~alerted~~ prompted a state agency to respond to an impending federal deadline it was about to miss and thereby kept the State from losing out $16 million in federal funds.

The Governor's budget address highlighted the importance of Money Follows the Person, a federal-state program that helps elders stay in their homes rather than going into nursing homes, thereby reduces State expenditures by millions of dollars annually. The COA has been the moving force behind Connecticut's "Rebalancing Movement" including the formulation and aggressive pursuit of an effective MFP program.

4. The COA has consistently delivered value at a minimum cost. The COA consists of 3 paid employees plus volunteer (unpaid/uncompensated) members. Our present budget is $240,000 which amounts to .00001 of the State's budget. In addition to the work referred to above, the COA serves as administrative staff for the Aging in Place Task Force (SA 12-6) and the Legislatively Mandated Grandparents Visitation Rights Task Force (SA 11-12). It co-chairs the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee, chairs the CT Elder Action Network (CEAN) and co-chairs of the legislatively mandated Long-Term Care Advisory Council.

BECAUSE MONEY IS SO TIGHT, THE STATE AND THE ELDERLY COMMUNITY CANNOT AFFORD TO BE WITHOUT THE COA