



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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Testimony for Public Hearing Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee

Commissioner Edith G. Prague

Good afternoon, Senator Kissel and Representative Mushinsky and distinguished members of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee. As you know, my name is Edith Prague and I am the Commissioner of the State Department on Aging. I am pleased to be before you today to address the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee and the study titled "Reemployment of Older Workers".

The U. S. Department of Labor says 41 percent of Americans ages 55 and older will soon make up 21 percent of the nation's workforce. Older workers are an asset to the employers in our state. They are proven to be more reliable with strong work ethics and flexible schedules. Older workers are highly motivated and regularly act as mentors to younger employees. As the number of residents who are 55 or older rises in our state, it is important that we have the services available to support these employees, in turn providing a capable workforce to our Connecticut businesses.

The State Department on Aging receives a federal grant called the Senior Community Service Employment Program or SCSEP. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, SCSEP provides paid job skills training through community service assignments and classroom settings; supportive services such as transportation assistance and English as a Second Language classes and job development services to assist older workers in finding jobs before they leave the

program. Upon completion of the program, participants have found jobs as a Veterans' Advocate, a Job Coach and as Home Health Care Workers.

To be eligible for SCSEP, an individual must be ages 55 or older, unemployed and be low-income as defined by the federal poverty guidelines.

This senior employment program provides services to eligible older adults, regardless of skill or educational level. The program focuses on the most in need elements as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor. Those most in need elements are:

- Disability or Severe Disability
- Frail
- Homelessness
- Limited English Proficiency
- Low Literacy Skills
- Persistent Unemployment
- Low employment prospects
- Living in Rural Areas
- Veteran

The United States Department of Labor funds three agencies provide these services to older workers in Connecticut. These agencies are the State Department on Aging, Easter Seals and Associates for Training and Development. For State Fiscal Year 2014, these agencies have

received a total of just over four and a half million dollars to assist 472 older workers. This funding level is down approximately 4 percent from 2013 levels due to federal sequestration. As a result of reduced funding, the number of older adults to be served statewide in 2014 has decreased by 21 statewide between the 3 agencies.

In SFY 2013 the Senior Community Service Employment Program in Connecticut helped 60 older workers find unsubsidized employment outside of the program. The average age of those who found employment was 61 years old; 72 percent were female and 61 percent were minority. Most adults had a high school diploma; 7 had less than a high school diploma and 7 held a bachelor's degree. Finally, of those 60 who found employment in 2013, 75 percent of these older adults met the most in need requirements.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program has a successful track record of providing job skills training to older workers in rural and urban areas. It has helped a variety of people from displaced homemakers to those currently receiving unemployment.

Despite a reduction in funding, there are currently 359 older workers enrolled with the Senior Community Service Employment Program across the state. Our service providers work hard to get these older adults the skills needed to be competitive in today's labor market. Our older workers want to be employed to supplement their limited income. We, at the State Department on Aging, stand ready to serve older workers. The positive result of employment stabilizes fragile financial situations; supports physical and mental health and enriches the overall economy of the state. I strongly support current and future funding for these job

training services for the reemployment of our older adults. I want to thank this committee for their interest in this issue facing older workers.