



Real Possibilities

Testimony of Kathy Null, AARP CT Volunteer

S.B. No. 179: AAC the Alzheimer's Disease & Dementia Task Force's Recommendations on Training;

H.B. No. 5225: AA Increasing Eligibility for the Connecticut Home-Care Program for the Elderly; &

H.B. No. 5228: AA Expanding Eligibility for the Alzheimer's Disease Respite Program

Aging Committee

February 25, 2014

Good morning, Members of the Aging Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kathy Null. I am an AARP advocacy volunteer from Bridgewater, CT.

AARP is pleased that the Aging Committee has raised legislation, **S.B. 179**, which would implement training requirements recommended by the Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Task Force. We also support proposals to expand the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders and Alzheimer's Respite Care Program. As a nonpartisan social mission organization representing nearly 37 million members age 50+, and over 603,000 here in Connecticut, AARP is a strong proponent of accessible, affordable and quality long-term supports and services.

We believe that the care provided in long-term care settings is only as good as the personnel who provide it. However, workforce challenges remain. Recent findings suggest that there are over 70,000 individuals age 65 and older living with Alzheimer's or a related dementia. Yet, despite the growing need, there are few Alzheimer's and dementia training requirements for health care professionals serving those individuals in our state.

The competency-based training outlined in **S.B. 179** would help build a high-quality workforce and improve care for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia.

Specifically, **S.B. 179** requires a nursing home administrator to establish a dementia care committee at each facility to review and recommend changes to improve person-centered planning, monitor wellness indicators and identify additional training needs.

The proposal would also ensure that nursing facility employees receive training upon employment, and annually thereafter, on the symptoms and appropriate care for individuals living with Alzheimer's or dementia. **S.B. 179** is the result of collaborative discussions with providers, consumers and advocates on the Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Task Force and we urge your support.

Note, AARP also supports expanding eligibility for the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program & the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders, provided the expansion does not negatively impact the ability of current enrollees to get services or supports. Both programs are cost-effective investments that honor consumer choice and avoid premature nursing home placement.

H.B. 5228 raises the income limit for the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program to \$50,000/annually. This program provides overburdened caregivers with financial grants to help pay for services such as adult day care, in-home care and short-term inpatient respite care.

In order to achieve the intended purpose, however, **H.B. 5228** must include adequate additional funding so newly eligible individuals can actually receive services. Section 2 of the legislation suggests the need for more funding, but does not designate a specific amount. We strongly support your effort to secure the necessary funding.

AARP also supports the proposal outlined in **H.B. 5225** to reduce the co-pay (from 7% to 6%) and expanded access to the state-funded Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders. This program provides vast resources of home health and social services to individuals age 65 and older at risk of institutional care. The program allows thousands of vulnerable seniors to live independently in their own home and gives family caregivers the peace of mind to know their loved ones are safe.

It also provides services at a fraction of the cost of a nursing home and prevents premature institutionalization. On average, the cost of serving seniors in the community is approximately one third of the cost to serve them in an institution.

Connecticut can respect individual autonomy and independence while maximizing limited state resources if we expand home and community based options through respected programs such as the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders and Alzheimer's Respite Care.

AARP looks forward to working with you to secure quality choices in long-term services and supports.

As a 68 year-old CT native and resident, I personally support these legislative bills. These will allow me, my spouse and other family members, and friends, to age with dignity in CT.

Thank you.