



Real Possibilities

Testimony of AARP Connecticut Volunteer Pat Gerckens

H.B. 5395: AAC AGING IN PLACE

March 4, 2014

Aging Committee

Good morning, Members of the Aging Committee. I am Pat Gerckens, an AARP volunteer from Derby. AARP is a membership organization of people 50 and older with 603,000 members in Connecticut. We believe that one's possibilities should never be limited by their age and that, in fact, age and experience can expand your possibilities, whether they be personal or professional. Thus, we strongly support H.B. 5395, An Act Concerning Aging in Place, which helps address our members' preferences to remain in their homes and have alternatives to nursing home care.

H.B. 5395 would:

1. Fund home modifications and technology needed for independent living;
2. Establish matching grants to help cities, towns and nonprofits develop initiatives and supportive services to help individuals age in place;
3. Improve the effectiveness of elderly nutrition programs; and
4. Recognize successful designs for livable communities.

I am approaching 77 and as I get older, I may need some extra help around the house, but that does not mean I want to give up the things I love. I am not alone in my thinking; most seniors prefer to age in their own home as long as possible. People want choice and control over everyday decisions. We want the freedom to decide when to get up in the morning, who helps us get dressed, what we eat and who we socialize with.

Personally, I love giving back as a volunteer with AARP and several other organizations that I belong to (including one of my favorites, the Gaelic American Club in Fairfield). I am a proud grandmother of five and so far, I have enjoyed my senior status and hope that this continues. I find that seniors who keep busy and get off their rockers have a better quality of life and stay healthier—longer!

Over the past several years, Connecticut has expanded the range of choices for people to remain in their own homes. BUT, we can do more. Much like the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders, H.B. 5395 can help individuals avoid or delay nursing home care.

Unlike Money Follows the Person—which requires someone to go into a nursing home before they can come out of a nursing home—H.B. 5395 provides the services necessary to keep seniors out of a nursing home in the first place.

The idea is simple, but powerful: older adults and people with disabilities can live in their own home, have meaningful and active lives in the community, just like everyone else. Sure, we may require some level of support, but that support should maximize our independence and help us participate fully in society.

In considering final language, AARP would recommend that **Section 3** explicitly include funding for programs that support unpaid family caregivers. When an aging parent, spouse or loved one needs help to remain in their home, the vast majority rely on unpaid family caregivers. These caregivers are the backbone of our long-term care system. My oldest, dearest friend is currently in this situation with her younger, senior citizen sister, renting an apartment and giving her 24/7 care. She does have some nursing services coming in at times...One to dress a foot wound that won't heal and another to help in the morning. My friend's sister pays over \$800 for the rent plus my friend Mary's Social Security. The caregiver cannot easily get any time off as the family members are all working and no one can fill in. She cannot afford repairs to her ancient car and it is just SOOOOO sad.

The care that Connecticut family caregivers provide is estimated to be worth \$5.8 billion per year. Please consider adding language to *expressly* include caregiver supports among the services eligible for matching grants.

AARP looks forward to working with you to ensure that older adults and those with disabilities have the option to age with dignity and respect. Together, we can help families keep their loved ones out of expensive nursing homes—and at HOME, where they WANT to be. Thank you.