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Testimony on Committee Bills 5001, 174, 5222, 5223, 5225, 5228, and 5229

Submitted by the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter

Senator Ayala, Representative Serra and members of the Committee, I am Patricia Wallace, here as a member of the Legislative Committee of the National Association of Social Workers, which has 3000 members serving people throughout our State. We would urge your support for the restoration of the Rental Rebate Program as proposed in Committee Bill 5001. We would also support several bills that would support what our clients want: to remain in their homes and communities as they age, a cost-effective alternative to unnecessary institutionalization. We urge favorable action on Committee Bills 174, 5222, 5223, 5225, 5228, and 5229.

As described by the State Office of Policy and Management, the Rental Rebate program framework is this:

Persons renting an apartment or room, or living in cooperative housing or a mobile home may be eligible for this program. Renters' rebates can be up to \$900 for married couples and \$700 for single persons. The renters' rebate amount is based on a graduated income scale and the amount of rent and utility payments (excluding telephone and cable) made in the calendar year prior to the year in which the renter applies. Application may be made at the town social service agency, or the Assessor's Office, depending on the town, between April 1st and October 1st.

The original rationale for the program was that, built in to rental fees are the property taxes that landlords must pay. Just as the State provides tax relief to elderly homeowners, the Rent Rebate Program is a way for the State to provide tax relief for low-income elderly and disabled renters. A year ago, the Rent Rebate Program was sunset. Public Act 13-234 was passed in July 2013 and closed the Renters' Rebate Program to new applicants. Beginning April 1, 2013 any renter who did not receive a grant under the program for calendar year 2011 was not be eligible to apply for a rebate. Any renter who did receive a grant for calendar year 2011 continued to be eligible to apply. However, anyone who misses a year would no longer be eligible to apply.

If you restore the Rental Rebate Program, it would assist low-income seniors aged 65 and up who rent their homes, as well as people aged 18 through 64 who are permanently and totally disabled who live on a low, fixed income. This program provides a check once a year of \$50 to \$900 per year, based on income, family size, and the cost of housing and utilities. The people who benefit, struggle to pay their bills and to put food on the table. In the City of New Haven, a 2012 study conducted on behalf of the Department of Elderly Services found that 41% of these low-income seniors have a difficult time being able to afford to buy the food they need to eat in a healthy way. In FY 2012-13, the year before the sunset, payments statewide totaled \$24,803,337, paid to 48,140 recipients. The typical grant was in the \$400 to \$500 range. All but 9 communities benefitted: Bridgewater, Canaan, Eastford, Easton, Hartland, Salem, Scotland, Union and

Weston. After the sunset last year, total payments were \$21,471,187, paid to 40,878 persons., a decrease of 7,262 or 15% in the number of people served.

NASW also strongly supports State action to expand home care to keep at-risk older adults from unnecessary institutionalization in nursing homes. Older adults want to remain in their homes and communities. To adjust State policy to accomplish this requires a multi-faceted approach: shifting funds toward more community-based services; respite care to give family caregivers a break; more funds for adult daycare and elderly nutrition; residential care homes or smaller-scale nursing homes that fall somewhere in the middle between nursing homes and life at home with in-home care. Your willingness to lead and innovate is commendable and essential, and has the additional virtue of favoring the taxpayer, because these initiatives will save money if done right. We would like to endorse and associate ourselves with the testimony of the Commission on Aging on the Governor's Budget on these matters.

Thank you for your kind attention. I would be happy to respond to questions.