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Written Testimony before the Aging Committee

Elizabeth B. Ritter on behalf of the State Department on Aging

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Good morning Senator Flexer, Representative Serra, Senator Kelly, Representative Bolinsky and distinguished members of the Committee on Aging. My name is Betsy Ritter. I am the Acting Commissioner of the State Department on Aging. I am here today to offer testimony regarding SB 1002: AN ACT CONCERNING SENIOR CENTERS.

Senior centers in Connecticut are a gathering place for older adults and are a valued and integral part of the aging network. Senior Centers offer a wide range of educational, recreational, health and social services to older adults so they may successfully "age in place". Most are multipurpose centers, providing meals, information and assistance, health and wellness programs, public benefits counseling, and much more. One program in particular, the elderly nutrition program, is supported by the State Department on Aging and our community partners to provide meals in participating senior centers.

Through the federal Older Americans Act, the five Area Agencies on Aging in CT designate multipurpose senior centers in their region as "focal points". Centers that are focal points have comprehensive and coordinated service delivery systems for older adults who may access multiple services in one place – their local senior center. A recommendation identified recently by the senior safety zone task force regarding senior centers is to standardize and define the role of senior centers in statute as community focal points in order to strengthen the role of the senior center within municipalities.

The State Department on Aging's three year State Plan on Aging which began this past October has an objective to elevate senior centers that are focal points that exemplify excellence and develop best practices in information and referral services. There are several strategies in our State Plan on Aging dedicated to senior centers which include: 1) Surveying senior centers and other local community partners on information and referral; 2) Developing information and referral training specifically for senior center



personnel; 3) Forming a senior center workgroup, with senior center staff, Department staff, Area Agency on Aging staff, and others to discuss current national accreditation, certification, funding, training, focal point designation, and best practices; and 4) Sharing best practices and other results from the senior center workgroup.

To that end, the State Department on Aging has designated a staff liaison to support senior centers and municipal agents for the elderly. The Department's liaison sends weekly updates to the 162 senior centers and 169 municipal agents and offers opportunities for meeting, networking and sharing ideas and best practices.

We wholeheartedly support and appreciate the valuable work that senior centers in Connecticut do. Thank you for your time and attention.

