



CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES

A PRIVATE NONPROFIT CORPORATION

872 MAIN STREET P.O. BOX 258 WILLIMANTIC, CT 06226-258

TELEPHONE (860) 456-1761 OR 1-800-413-7796 (CLIENT TOLL-FREE LINE)

FAX (860) 456-7420

E-MAIL WILLIMANTIC@CONNLEGALESERVICES.ORG

JOELEN J. GATES
MANAGING ATTORNEY
OFFICE

SHIRLEY BERGERT
MANAGING ATTORNEY
PUBLIC BENEFITS UNIT

ANNE LOUISE BLANCHARD
LITIGATION DIRECTOR

CATHERINE CUSHMAN
CHERYL DIANE FEUERMAN
BET GAILOR
JILLIAN L. GRISWOLD
REBECCA LOOS
SAMUEL T.D. NEVES, JR.
ROYAL STARK
WENDY W. WANCHAK
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

CAROLE MASTERS
VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY

LAUREL J. FREEMAN
PARALEGAL

THOMAS W. CRATTY, JR.
VOLUNTEER PARALEGAL

HEROILDA RIOS
KENNETH TIRADO
LEGAL ASSISTANTS

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
62 WASHINGTON STREET
MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457
(860) 344-0447

RICHARD F. ORR
BOARD CHAIR

STEVEN D. EPPLE-EPSTEIN
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LAW OFFICES
211 STATE STREET
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604

16 MAIN STREET
NEW BRITAIN, CT 06051

153 WILLIAMS STREET
NEW LONDON, CT 06320

20 SUMMER STREET
STAMFORD, CT 06901

85 CENTRAL AVENUE
WATERBURY, CT 06702

872 MAIN STREET
WILLIMANTIC, CT 06226

SATELLITE OFFICES

5 COLONY STREET
MERIDEN, CT 06451

98 SOUTH MAIN STREET
SOUTH NORWALK, CT 06854

29 NAEK ROAD, SUITE 5A
VERNON, CT 06066

Appropriations Committee

March 5, 2015

Testimony of Joelen J. Gates

Governor's Bill No. 6824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE

Testimony in Support of the Governor's Budget Recommendation Regarding the Legislative Commission on Aging

My name is Joelen Gates and I am the managing attorney of the Willimantic office of Connecticut Legal Services, a private, non-profit law firm. I practice elder law and am also a member of the Long Term Care Advisory Council which among other responsibilities works in collaboration with the Long Term Care Planning Committee (executive branch agencies).

I am here today to ask your support of the Commission on Aging (CoA), an independent research and policy organization in the legislative branch.

The baby boomer population is aging and causing a rise in demand for long term care services. The state spends about \$2.8 billion or 14% of the state budget for long-term care services and the amount is increasing every year as more baby boomers become eligible for and need long term care. Currently over a million people, about one-third of the Connecticut population, are baby boomers, elderly or people of all ages with disabilities who may need long term care services and supports now or in the future.

The CoA has been instrumental in formulating the state long term care plan that aims to shift the balance of state resources from expensive nursing home care to home and community based services for the elderly. State funding for more long term care support and services in community settings will save the state even more money as Connecticut's population ages and the demand for long term care grows. The CoA has also promoted needed long term care services for younger people with disabilities who are not served by the state Medicaid waivers for the elderly.

The CoA provides invaluable assistance to the legislature and aging community and is not duplicated by any other state agency or office. As an independent, non-partisan voice for older Connecticut residents, it provides reliable information based on unbiased research and state-wide surveys on the needs of Connecticut's population for long term care.



Over the past 14 years I have personally worked with Julie Evans Starr, the Executive Director of the CoA, who chairs and provides strong leadership for the Long Term Care Advisory Council (LTCAC). In addition to the LTCAC, Ms. Evans Starr and the CoA staff have provided leadership and staff support for the Grandparents' Visitation Rights Task Force, Aging in Place Task Force, Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Task Force, and Senior Safety Task Force. Ms. Evans Starr has been the co-chair of the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee and chair of the Money Follows the Person Workforce Development Subcommittee. The CoA created, chairs and manages the CT Elder Action Network, and the CoA is an active member of the Council on Medical Assistance Program Oversight.

The CoA gives the state a big bang for its buck. With only four staff members and a modest budget of approximately \$450,000, the CoA has enlisted the expertise and experience of 21 volunteers from around the state to help guide, inform, and provide needed assistance to the CoA in its mission. There is still much work to be done to improve the home and community based care that Connecticut citizens want and need as they get older or become disabled. Please continue your support of the one state commission devoted to this mission.