

*Written Testimony*

*Aging Committee*

*February 25, 2016*

*Elizabeth B. Ritter, State Department on Aging*

Senator Flexer, Representative Serra, Senator Kelly, Representative Bolinsky and distinguished members of the Aging Committee. My name is Betsy Ritter. I am the Commissioner of the State Department on Aging. I am here today to provide testimony in opposition to HB 5285: AN ACT REQUIRING THE STATE OMBUDSMAN TO INVESTIGATE COMPLAINTS CONCERNING RECIPIENTS OF HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED CARE.

I want to thank the committee for dedicating time to discussing this important issue.

The Ombudsman's Office currently works to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of the approximately 35,000 residents of our nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and residential care homes. Staff is located in regional offices, responding to complaints brought forward by residents, family members, and/or other individuals acting on their behalf. As the state has worked to rebalance the nursing home population by building a network of home and community based services to provide care and using funds from the Money Follows the Person and now Community First Choice programs to help pay for that care, residents remaining in our nursing homes now bring higher levels of acuity with more complications and co-morbidities, often requiring a higher level of involvement with their Ombudsman.

At the same time, our state demographics continue to change. Our population is becoming older and living longer, adding to the need for more services that help keep residents in their homes. Greater numbers of CT residents are requiring home and community-based services to remain in their home – and the state continues to work to encourage that. The state realizes financial benefits as residents prefer to stay at home, but at the same time, SDA appreciates the need to help ensure the protection of their health, safety, welfare and rights.

However, in order to do that, we do not feel that the approach proposed in this bill is the most effective at this time.



The bill establishes a new position, Assistant State Ombudsman. If the intent of the bill is for this new position to represent the rights of residents who receive their services in the community, this task would prove to be very challenging, as is shown by the following points:

- No work has been done to develop a practice model or structure for this program. The most recent study, done at UConn, with the intent of determining best practices in delivering such a program, was not conclusive. Of the states that have expanded, no best practice or model emerged.
- There is no funding for this expansion. States that have expanded their Ombudsman services have used a variety of funding streams to afford the program. For example, Ohio uses funds from its provider bed tax, and Georgia dedicates a portion of its Money Follows the Person reimbursement to fund the expansion. There are currently no funding opportunities through the federal Older Americans Act to fund community ombudsman services.
- It is not feasible that one position would be able to represent the needs of this population and unwise to establish the expectation that could occur. Currently about 45,000 residents on Medicaid alone rely on community supports and services and this is only going to grow as more residents receive services in their homes. As stated previously, funding is not available to fund one or more positions to dedicate to this proposed initiative.

At this time, I cannot support expansion of the Ombudsman services to include home and community-based services without preparation, planning, funding, or procedures to ensure the services would be delivered appropriately, efficiently, economically, legally, respectfully or responsibly. Due to the new economic reality our state faces, SDA must focus on prioritizing the provision of our core services and this new proposed initiative would directly impact our ability to do so.

The State Department on Aging is happy to continue to work to ensure the health and safety of our state's residents as they are increasingly able to age in place in the community. The demographics of our state are very clear and it is important and responsible that we do so. Equally important is that we do it correctly, with the safety and security of our residents appropriately provided for.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.





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