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## AGING COMMITTEE

### PUBLIC HEARING

March 8, 2018

Please accept this written testimony from the Office of the State Ombudsman. My name is Nancy Shaffer and I thank you for the opportunity to offer the perspective of the Ombudsman on these various proposals. I thank the Committee for raising these bills and for your insights about the needs of Connecticut's aging population.

#### **H.B. No. 272 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING VISITS BY NONAMBULATORY NURSING HOME RESIDENTS TO THE HOMES OF THEIR FAMILIES**

This is a wonderful proposal with the intent to allow more nonambulatory nursing home residents to visit the homes of their families. Facilitating residents' visitation with family members in a non-institutional setting is important to the overall health and well-being of that individual. But often times it is difficult for families to transport their loved ones due to their nonambulatory status. The limitations of personal vehicles generally do not make it possible for families to use their private vehicles to transport their loved one.

Unfortunately, there are probably only a few nursing homes in Connecticut which have onsite transportation services and the bill may only affect a small handful of homes. In today's competitive long-term services and supports environment it may be an incentive for some homes to consider providing such a service to consumers.

#### **H.B. No. 257 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE OFFICE OF THE LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN**

This proposal seeks to expand the duties of the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman to include home and community-based services and to add an Assistant State Ombudsman to the Program staff. These are both recommendations which would benefit Connecticut long-term services and supports consumers and the work of the Program and we appreciate the intent of the proponent. Federal Ombudsman funds are restricted to the use of advocacy services for individuals residing in long-term care facilities. Thus, other funding sources must be identified to provide those community advocacy services.

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As the goals and wishes of long-term care services and supports consumers evolve and the choice to receive their supports and services in the community are more readily available, advocacy services should also be readily available. The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is very interested in supporting the advocacy needs of these consumers as funding is identified.

**S.B. No. 235 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING OMBUDSMAN VOLUNTEERS**

This proposal provides that the Ombudsman develops a plan to increase the numbers of Volunteer Resident Advocates who assist the Program in its mission to provide advocacy to the residents of long-term care facilities. With respect, it should be noted that it is an ongoing initiative of the Program to seek out qualified individuals interested in training to become volunteers. The Ombudsman appreciates the interest of the Committee in this aspect of the Ombudsman Program and desires to keep a focus on building a strong cadre of trained volunteers. The Ombudsman will continue to identify strategies to increase the numbers of volunteers and will report to the legislature its plan and progress as mandated, should the General Assembly pass this proposal.

**S.B. No. 309 (RAISED) AN ACT ALIGNING THE OFFICE OF THE LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN WITH THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT**

The passage of this proposal will ensure Connecticut's compliance with the new federal rule for the ombudsman. It is the first time since the inception of the Ombudsman Program in the early 1970's that comprehensive regulations have been issued. Based on the varied experiences of each Ombudsman Program throughout the country and with the full support and implementation by the Administration on Community Living these new regulations took effect July 1, 2016. The Connecticut Ombudsman has worked with the Administration on Community Living to identify those areas of Connecticut statute and regulation which required revision. Some of the major aspects of the new rule include no age limitations of individuals who may be provided Ombudsman advocacy, ensuring that the Ombudsman is not required to register as a lobbyist, defining functions and responsibilities of the Ombudsman and updating certain definitions such as "representative" of the resident.

The Ombudsman appreciates the support of Commissioner Amy Porter, Department of Rehabilitation Services, in assisting with the Ombudsman activities to comply with the new regulations. While the Connecticut Ombudsman Program already had in place many of the statutory guidelines and policies that were in line with the new rule, I think you will see from Commissioner Porter's testimony as well that the new regulations strengthen the Ombudsman's mission to protect and advocate for long-term care residents.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have and look forward to working with you throughout the legislative session on these proposals.

Respectfully,

Nancy Shaffer

