



Testimony to the Housing Committee

In Support of

House Bill 7227, An Act Concerning Aging in Place

Presented by Mag Morelli, President of LeadingAge Connecticut

March 5, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Bradley, Representative McGee, and members of the Housing Committee. My name is Mag Morelli and I am the President of LeadingAge Connecticut, a membership association representing over 130 not-for-profit organizations serving older adults across the continuum of care, services, supports and senior housing. I am pleased to present testimony today in support of *House Bill 7227, An Act Concerning Aging in Place*.

The bill before you today would mandate that the Department of Housing conduct a study of methods to assist older adults who wish to continue living independently in their homes and communities as long as possible. We would welcome such a study and if this bill is to be enacted, we would offer our assistance to the Committee and the Department of Housing as you conduct the study.

LeadingAge Connecticut and our national partner, LeadingAge, have long been strong proponents of linking affordable senior housing with long term services and supports; a model that enables older adults to remain in the community where they can thrive as they age.

We know that a large and rapidly expanding population of low-income older adults faces the dual challenges of finding affordable housing that can accommodate changing needs as they grow older. Millions of older adult renters and homeowners across the country face excessive housing costs and/or live in housing with serious physical problems. As they age, an increasing proportion of these older adults experience multiple chronic illnesses. In many cases, deteriorating physical and cognitive functioning impede the ability of these older adults to live independently in the community.

Our national partner's research arm, The LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston, is striving to address these challenges by serving as a national catalyst for the development, adoption, and support of innovative affordable housing solutions that enable older adults with low and modest incomes to age safely and successfully in their homes and communities.

We are proud of the fact that Connecticut has developed several nationally acclaimed models of senior housing plus services. These models include allowing assisted living services that are funded through the Connecticut Home Care Program to be delivered to residents living in our state congregate and HUD 202 housing sites, as well as within the four pilot Subsidized Assisted

Living Demonstration sites. We have excellent models of providing affordable senior housing plus services in this state, but we are in need of more units to meet the growing needs of our elderly population.

Anecdotally it is clear that we are victims of our own success. The model of providing services and supports within affordable senior housing settings is allowing older adults to age in place and remain in their units much longer than our previous experience. This success means that fewer units open up and the waiting lists continue to grow. Our members report waiting lists hundreds of names long. We need to invest in building more units of affordable senior housing to meet this growing need.

The national data also demonstrates the growing need for affordable senior housing in Connecticut. Three years ago, LeadingAge asked the National Low-Income Housing Coalition to run housing need data by state for age 60+ households. The data shows that of the *Extremely Low-Income* households in Connecticut with one person 60+ (renters and owners, but not homeless), 80.9% of them – or 66,215 households – are *burdened* by housing costs that are greater than 30% of their income. 65.5% - or 53,611 households – are *severely burdened* with housing costs of more than 50% of their income. And there are thousands more households in similar situations that are considered very low income or low income. (*Extremely Low-Income Households* are those with household incomes below 30 percent of area median income which in Connecticut in 2016 was \$89,400.)

There is a need for affordable senior housing and we urge the state to seek ways to enable and incentivize its development. We are encouraged that this proposed study would look into the potential funding mechanisms that might be available to achieve this and we would be more than willing to tap into our national resources to assist with the study if enacted.

Older adults must be afforded the opportunity to remain in the towns and cities that they have lived in, or to be near the families that they love. The study proposed in this bill is a step forward toward achieving this goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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