Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee

February 18, 2010

From: Don Dimenstein, Former Director, Department of Elderly Services
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I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address the distinguished members of the General Assembly's Appropriations Committee.

As the retired Director of the Department of Elderly Services for the City of New Haven, I am writing today to implore members of the Appropriations Committee to again reject Governor Rell's short-sighted proposal to eliminate the Connecticut Commission on Aging.

I am proud to say that until my term recently expired, I served as an unpaid, volunteer member of the Commission and as its secretary. I was appointed to a second term on the Commission by Senator Martin Looney in 2005.

In again recommending abolishment of the Commission, Gov. Rell is proposing that our state take several steps backwards in its commitment to meet the present and future needs of hundreds of thousands of older adults and their families.

Her proposal is unwise both fiscally, and more important, from a quality-of-life perspective.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between now and 2030 Connecticut's population of people 65 years of age and older will increase by an astounding 64 percent. In addition to one million baby boomers, 600,000 people are 60 years of age or older and by 2040, the number of people 85 and older will increase threefold.

The Commission on Aging's world-class research work alone contributes to a better future for Connecticut, including providing recommendations that offer the potential to save our state hundreds of millions of dollars annually on Medicaid long-term care costs. This is verified by independent research conducted, with the Commission's oversight, by the UConn Center on Aging. Equally important—and I would like to emphasize this point—the Commission provides a critical level of accountability within state government.

The people of New Haven and throughout Connecticut would be ill-served by eliminating an independent agency that actually saves them money, works to improve the quality of their lives, and provides essential accountability.

The Commission fills a unique, nonpartisan leadership role. Its functions are not duplicated anywhere within either present or proposed offices of the Executive or Legislative branches of government.

Clearly, the Commission's leadership role in helping Connecticut prepare for the unprecedented demographic explosion we now face has never been more critical.

I would also like to note that the Commission is citizen-driven, supported by a small but highly effective and efficient four-person professional staff. Its 21 unpaid voting members come from communities throughout the state. The Commission's extremely modest budget—recently reduced by 50%-- delivers a sound and wise investment in Connecticut's future.

From a purely fiscal perspective alone, I implore the Appropriations Committee to work to restore the Commission's budget. Entertaining any call to eliminate the agency is simply irresponsible.

It's clear that any objective assessment of the Commission's performance will show that it is a low-cost, highly efficient and effective agency.

The Commission on Aging needs to be preserved; and fully funded to help lead the state through this challenging time and to prepare for the needs of its burgeoning older-adult population.

Thank you very much.

Don Dimenstein

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