



State of Connecticut
Department of Aging and Disability Services
Office of the Commissioner

Testimony before the Aging Committee

Amy Porter – Commissioner

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Senate Bill 56, An Act Deterring Age Discrimination in Employment Applications.

Senate Bill 814, An Act Establishing a Task Force to Review Voluntarism Needs of the State Ombudsman.

Senate Bill 812, An Act Expanding Eligibility for the Alzheimer's Disease Respite Care Program.

Senate Bill 817, An Act Concerning Senior Centers.

Chairman Slap, Chairman, Phipps, Senator Kelly, Representative Wilson and distinguished members of the Aging Committee - my name is Amy Porter. I am the Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) and I thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bills 56, 814, 812 and 817.

I would like to commend the Committee for its dedication to improving the lives of Connecticut's older residents. Our agency's mission is "to maximize opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut." I appreciate that this committee shares these important goals and has introduced important legislation.

First, I would like to speak in support of Senate Bill 56, An Act Deterring Age Discrimination in Employment Applications. One of the programs in our State Unit on Aging is the **Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)**. This program seeks to help low-income older adults re-enter the workforce. We also administer several additional employment programs for individuals with disabilities and these programs have no upper age limit. We applaud any effort to diminish the effect of age discrimination in hiring and we support passage of this bill.

We also support Senate Bill 814, An Act Establishing a Task Force to Review Voluntarism Needs of the State Ombudsman. Active, trained volunteers can and do play a crucial role in our agency's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP). The individuals who take on these demanding roles help us greatly in monitoring the care and treatment provided by Connecticut's nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. There is no doubt, especially in light of the COVID-19 crisis, that additional volunteers serving in the role of Resident Advocate would expand direct support to residents in problem solving and assistance with addressing individual concerns. We are pleased that the bill includes our department in the proposed task force and we look forward to working collaboratively with all parties to find the best ways to increase the role and number of volunteers available for this work.

Next, I would like to discuss Senate Bill 812, An Act Expanding Eligibility for the Alzheimer's Disease Respite Care Program, ADS administers the **Connecticut Statewide Respite Care Program (CSRCP)**. This program offers respite services including relief, information and support to caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias. Our program assists those who may not qualify for any other program, such as the Connecticut Homecare Program for Elders (CHCPE), or who may be waiting to qualify for such a program. With statutory income and asset limits in place, the Respite Care Program is operated as a needs-based program.

There may be some confusion about the monetary thresholds for eligibility for this program. The statute in question (CGS Sec. 17b-349e) says that the income limit for eligibility is \$41,000 and that the asset limit is \$109,000. This bill proposes to increase the income limit to \$50,000 and the asset limit to \$127,000.

However, it should be noted that the statute also tells our agency to increase the income and asset limits annually in line with the Social Security COLA. Therefore, as of July 1 of this year, the effective date of the bill, the income limit will grow to \$48,266 and the asset limit will grow to \$128,321. Senate Bill 812 would increase the income limit only slightly and actually decrease the asset limit.

We also want to point out that any increase in the eligible population will force us to spread out our services more thinly. It is our concern then such a change will decrease the amount of funds available to lower income clients. We believe that increasing the program's eligibility limits cannot be afforded without potentially hurting those with the greatest financial need. Therefore, we do not support increasing the monetary thresholds at this time.

Last, I would like to endorse Senate Bill 817, An Act Concerning Senior Centers. Senior centers and the broader aging network can benefit from more coordination and sharing of information and expertise and this bill furthers that goal. We are grateful that Section 2 now refers to the federal definition of multi-purpose senior centers since much of our support and oversight comes from the federal government and we want to avoid any potential conflict between state and federal law. Section 3 asks the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity to coordinate assistance, direction and advice to senior centers about the latest and best practices available to pursue their mission. We are confident that the Commission will be very helpful in this work. Lastly, Section 4 creates a senior center "working group." Again, we look forward to the assistance and direction such a group of stakeholders and experts can bring to this topic and we appreciate that our agency has been included in the membership. We know we can contribute to this important conversation.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues and for allowing me the opportunity to offer this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.