Good morning, Senator Maroney, Representative D’Agostino, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the General Law Committee.

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization that advocates for individuals age 50 and older. We have a membership of 38 million nationwide and approximately 600,000 in Connecticut. We advocate at the state and federal level for the issues that matter most to older adults and their families. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 6100, An Act Concerning Department of Consumer Protection Licensing and Enforcement.

We would like to comment specifically on Sections 24 and 25 of HB 6100. Section 24 of HB 6100 would prohibit a homemaker-companion agency from presenting itself as an organization that provides medical or health care services, and Section 25 would require homemaker-companion agencies to conduct a state and national background check on prospective employee and would bar people with certain criminal convictions from working for a homemaker-companion agency for a five-year period.

AARP CT greatly appreciates the important work of homemaker-companion agencies. Many older adults and people with disabilities want to receive services in community settings rather than nursing homes or other institutions, and homemaker-companions provide assistance that makes this possible. We recognize that homemaker-companion agencies have objections to the additional expense and hiring delays that would result from conducting state and national background checks, as proposed in this legislation, instead of comprehensive background checks, as currently required in statute. While we believe that a state and national background check (as defined in Sec. 29-17a) may have potential to provide consumers with helpful information, we also acknowledge that background checks of any kind are not a panacea, nor do they guarantee safety.

Our support for HB 6100 is less about the type of background check used to screen homemaker-companions and more about consistency. Section 25 of HB 6100 would address a point of confusion for individuals seeking home care services. Many consumers do not fully understand the different services provided by home health agencies, homemaker-companion agencies, homemaker-home health aide agencies, and registries, but they reasonably – and incorrectly – assume that they all have similar standards for screening workers. AARP has spoken to consumers who are shocked to learn that homemaker-companions undergo a less rigorous background check process than individuals employed by home health agencies and other long-term care providers, despite the fact that homemaker-companions can be in a client’s home 24/7, have access to their finances, and help them with very personal tasks. HB 6100 would make the background checks conducted by homemaker-companion agencies more similar to background checks conducted by home health agencies, though they would still not be identical (per Sec. 19a-491c, the “Criminal history and patient abuse background search” or “background search” required for home health agencies and other long-term care facilities includes: (A) a review of the registry of nurse’s aides maintained by the Department of Public
Health pursuant to section 20-102bb, (B) checks of state and national criminal history records conducted in accordance with section 29-17a, and (C) a review of any other registry specified by the Department of Public Health which the department deems necessary for the administration of a background search program).

AARP also hears from consumers that marketing materials from home care agencies can be confusing and sometimes misleading. Section 24 of HB 6100 may help consumers distinguish homemaker-companion agencies from other types of service providers, but it would be helpful to clarify what is meant by “words relating to medical or health care licensure or services.”

Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments. If you have any questions, I can be reached at: adoroghazi@aarp.org