



**Testimony of Terry Allton, BSSW, LSW, MHA
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**Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs
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Good Morning Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Sarbanes and members of the Committee. My name is Terry Allton and I am the Vice President of Support Services at National Church Residences, a non-profit housing, services and healthcare provider, based in Columbus, Ohio. National Church Residences has been dedicated to providing quality housing and supportive services at affordable prices to low and moderate-income seniors since 1961. NCR has over 225 communities throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, housing more than 15,000 low-income elderly, families and persons with disabilities. As a member of the aging and not-for-profit community we feel that it is our responsibility to share our experiences and input in the formation of public policy affecting those that we serve. I am excited to be here to talk to you about housing, supportive services and the need for Senate Bill 705.

National Church Residence's Department of Support Services is nationally recognized as a leader in the housing industry and our Quality Assurance program has won national awards as the most comprehensive program of its kind in the country. Our belief in the benefits of community-based services and supportive housing is demonstrated by our commitment to attempt to place service coordinators in 100% of our facilities. In the early 1990s Congress enacted the Cranston-Gonzalez Act which authorized the service coordinator program. There have been appropriations since 1991 through HUD. This launched a profession with the sole purpose of addressing quality of life issues for the elderly offering possible options to age-in-place.

Our goal is to link residents with services that will allow them to remain independent, in their own homes and avoid premature institutionalization. We use a variety of funding sources to pay for service coordination, including HUD funding and private grants. The primary function of a service coordinator is to work with service delivery systems, provide resource information, identify programs and assist seniors through the labyrinth of regulations attributable to a multitude of government agencies. Our elderly residents typically do not know who supplies which services or that some services even exist.

National Church Residences is a founding organization of the American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC), a national, nonprofit organization representing more than 1,500 professional service coordinators who serve more than 400,000 low-income older persons and other special populations living in federally assisted and public housing facilities nationwide. Like others on this panel, NCR is an active member of AAHSA and its state affiliate, the Association of Ohio Philanthropic Homes, Housing and Services for the Aging (AOPHA). I am also here representing AASC as the current Chair of their Board of Directors. AASC has long urged that housing, health care and other federal support programs serving the elderly join together to better focus federal policy and regulatory efforts, in conjunction with states and communities. Senate Bill 705 will do just that.

Before I talk about our service coordinator program, I would like to talk to about NCR's commitment to the preservation of affordable housing and serving residents as they age-in-place. NCR has long advocated for Congress to recognize the importance of preserving existing affordable housing and helping residents at risk of losing their housing as providers "opt-out" of HUD programs and sell or convert their properties to market rate. We are losing more senior housing than we are building. To date more than 15,000 units of federally assisted senior units have been converted to market rents. According to GAO 20 of the 41 older Section 202 properties that will reach the end of their mortgage commitments by 2013, do not have rental assistance. This means that those seniors will be in a precarious position to meet their housing and service needs at a time when federal, state and local communities will have experienced several years of tight budgets and housing and services are so fragmented.

Housing and services go hand-in-hand for seniors aging in place. One without the other spells disaster for residents as they become frailer, with limited options and few resources. Service coordinators serve as a lifeline for seniors in all manner of housing settings and have become increasingly important part of our older senior housing communities, where people have lived for 20 + years, aging-in-place. For individual residents, service coordinators do on the local level, or at best try to do what this legislation would do at the federal level by coordinating, what is frequently referred to as the "crazy quilt" of health, housing and service programs utilized by seniors.

Service coordinators identify resident needs, work within the community to locate resources, provide limited case management and organize health and wellness programs. Service

coordinators also arrange homemaker services, transportation and meals assistance. They offer one-on-one help for residents by providing intensive assistance with entitlement and benefit programs, insurance, Medicare and Medicaid. Service coordinators act as a broker for services that are difficult to obtain through public resources and assist residents in securing the help that they need to live safely and independently through community agencies. Their role not only enhances quality of life issues faced by elders and their families, but may also influence the cost of caring for elders by keeping them in non-institutional care longer.

The first stage of providing a continuum of housing and service choices for the elderly is in-home supportive services. Individuals with ample resources, many times, have easier access and a greater variety of choices in how and from whom services are acquired. Those living on a fixed income are more reliant on publicly funded services, governed by federal departments and regulations that are frequently overburdened, financially restrictive, and severely limited, and often unable to meet the demands placed on the existing system. In addition, navigating through a system of segmented service providers and benefits is often difficult for older persons and their families. Service coordinators are the interagency council in action. Their lives and jobs will be made a lot easier by Senate Bill 705 - not to mention what it will mean to seniors and family caregivers who may be unfamiliar with the aging services field.

NCR's Support Services Division has gone to great lengths to quantify the benefits of service coordinators. We continually monitor programs, offer training and track outcomes. We produce tools, such as a monthly report, a semi-annual report and resident and manager surveys. NCR provides quality assurance to service coordinators working at 249 communities providing services to approximately 21,875 residents. Each service coordinator serves an average 87.9 residents. Over 28% of the residents are 80 years of age or older and over 38% are considered "frail" or "at-risk", meaning they need assistance with 1-3 or more activities of daily living (ADLs) per day. A recent study performed by NCR found that service coordinator time is allocated accordingly:

- Advocacy to service agencies, management and vendors on behalf of the residents: 16%
- Helping residents with Benefits and Entitlements: 13.7%
- Case management: 9.5%
- Monitoring services: 8.6%
- Referrals to Health Care Services: 6.4%

- Conducting Assessments: 5.5%

It is a testament to the benefit of service coordinators in housing settings that only 3.2% of their time is spent on crisis intervention.

In addition to navigating services, service coordinators help elderly residents take advantage of cost saving program opportunities, such as prescription drug discounts, phone bills, utility bills, supplemental insurance, medical equipment, and food. Seventy percent (70%) of our residents received two or more interventions by our service coordinators that resulted in cost savings of an average \$2,944.40 per year per resident. Imagine how difficult it is for a senior living alone without access to a service coordinator.

Service coordinators also provide a cost saving benefit to our subsidized housing communities, by preventing unnecessary vacancies. The average cost for a vacancy in one of NCR's facilities is \$1,732. Service coordinators help residents avoid potential eviction, undesired move-outs and unnecessary placement at a higher, more costly level of care. In one study, we were able to establish that service coordinators in NCR facilities saved the properties an average of \$2,393 per property over a four-month period by making it possible for residents to remain in their homes, aging-in-place. One study shows that housing with home health care services costs approximately \$60.00/day, while one day in assisted living costs \$100/day, and a day in a skilled care facility costs \$180/day. The cost-savings of in-home supportive services is staggering.

A preventative, expansive, affordable range of community-based services is essential to making our communities, our staffs and our residents successful, but more can be done. The types of programs that our seniors rely on often come from federal departments and agencies or state programs that are federally funded. From Transportation to HUD to CMS, we work with a staggering number of regulations and eligibility requirements. Under Senator Sarbanes' bill, the primary people responsible for all of these programs will be brought to the table. This bill will give leaders a chance to look at these programs with a bird's eye view in the context of senior housing, services and long-term care. We in the industry have a number of ideas on how to make programs work better together. It would be far more beneficial to bring these issues to those that set and implement the policies that govern the programs.

Too often we spend time going from agency to agency and writing various headquarters offices, trying to make programs work together in order to meet our resident's needs. We have

made some headway and the state and local agencies are eager to help, but the simple fact is that it is unnecessarily time consuming for us, and for the agency and department staff. I urge you to consider the benefits to establishing an interagency council and to support Senate Bill 705.

Federal, state and local governments are struggling with soaring costs related to caring for our seniors. This legislation will give the federal government and our policy makers an opportunity to create a workable solution to cost effective, non-institutionalized long-term care - housing and services.

Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Sarbanes, members of the committee, thank you for your time and consideration of this important piece of legislation. The Meeting the Housing and Services Needs Act is the first step in maximizing program effectiveness, addressing the need for federal coordination of programs and most importantly, serving seniors where they are – in their homes. I urge you to act on this legislation before we face a system that is ill prepared to serve the numbers of seniors in the future. Our federal programs serve a very real need, a need that will continue to grow. Unfortunately, sometimes it seems that change takes a while with complicated programs. We cannot afford to wait. The commitment of the departments and agencies at the federal level can make this work. Again, on behalf of NCR, our staff and residents, thank you for your time and work on important issue.