

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: my name is David Hicks. I'm the Chairman of the New Haven Commission on Disabilities. I am strongly in favor of Senate Bill 444, concerning Parking for Persons with Disabilities. I am also in favor of SB 1093, which supports demand-responsive transportation for the elderly and people with disabilities.

This is my third year speaking on the issue of Disability Parking at these hearings. I think this committee's members are well aware that the program is broken, so I'll briefly summarize the reasons we need this bill. Since 2000, the state has issued Disability Parking permits that don't expire. Over these 9 years the Department of Motor Vehicles has issued more than 400,000 lifetime permits. (I say this because DMV has issued two placards to any permit-holder who asked for them, but only counted this dual-distribution as a single permit.) This means that far more permits are in circulation than there are people with the requisite disabilities in our state. In contrast, Massachusetts, with almost twice the population of Connecticut, has issued only 278,000 permits, which expire every 5 years. The issuance of lifetime permits ignores the fact that some permit holders move out of state and others die. But their permits live on, and we have no means of removing them from the system. To fix the problem we must phase out the old placards and issue new ones that expire.

SB 444 will also assist municipalities in enforcing the law, which is virtually impossible under the present system. Linking the permit holder's license-photo to the placard in the state's COLLECT database would give police an effective means of catching fraudulent permit users. The inclusion of the last 5 digits of the license number on the placard would make determining legality a certainty. Let me point out here that in Massachusetts, enforcing the Disability Parking law has provided significant revenue streams to its municipalities. For example, in the town of Waltham Mass., population 53,000, in a 10 month span last year the town took in \$200,000 simply by enforcing the law.

In July 2008 the New Haven Disabilities Commission met with Commissioner Ward of DMV and Senator DeFronzo. Commissioner Ward agreed that there were serious flaws with the Disability Parking program, including a high incidence of fraudulent use of permits, as well as oversupply of permits. DMV has since created its own task force which drafted proposed changes to the law, some of which are in accordance with SB 444, most importantly the following: "Implement a renewal process for permanent placards, linking the expiration of the placard to the expiration date of the non driver identification card or the driver's license."

I'm therefore hopeful that DMV will be receptive to SB 444. But even if they are, and the bill moves through all the necessary committees, I'm concerned that an oversized fiscal note will once again kill this year's bill. If DMV has lowered its estimated cost for implementation of this bill, as I expect they have, then that information needs to go to OFA before they issue their fiscal note.

On the subject of cost, one more point. In January 2008 I met with Senator DeFronzo prior to the drafting of last year's bill. I recommended following Massachusetts' use of an online form for citizen complaints. It's in the current bill again, in Section 1 paragraph (o). However, Commissioner Ward indicated in July that this feature would incur significant cost. Though I requested this feature, I would hate to see it used to defeat the bill. I would recommend that if it proves too costly, it should be removed from the bill. I urge this committee to communicate with DMV on these subjects as soon as possible.

Finally, a word on how this bill will affect people with disabilities. When able-bodied people use permits issued to people with disabilities, it robs us of access to our communities. Access can mean the difference between getting, or skipping, medical care. It means we can go to the supermarket, the home improvement store, or the drugstore, by ourselves. Thus it gives us independence. Such access and independence are good things for our communities, but they are essential to us. I thank you for your time.