STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
60B WESTON STREET, HARTFORD, CT 06120-1551

JAMES D. McGAUGHEY
Executive Director

Phone: 1/860-297-4307
Confidential Fax: 1/860-297-4305

Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
Before The Joint Committee on Public Safety

Submitted by: James D. McGaughey
Executive Director

February 3, 2009

Good morning, and thank you for receiving our Office's comments on **Raised Bill No. 761, AN ACT CONCERNING AN ENHANCED 9-1-1 SERVICE DATABASE.**

This bill would allow use of subscriber information from the State's Enhanced 9-1-1 database by municipalities that have or acquire telephone – based emergency notification systems. Emergency notification systems are sometimes referred to as "Reverse 9-1-1", which is actually the trade name of one such system. Using sophisticated technology, these systems can, in a very short period of time, generate thousands of individual telephone calls to targeted geographic areas, carrying warning messages and specific instructions. (They can also send messages in text form to deaf and hard of hearing people via TTYs and other text devices, provided those individuals have pre-registered.) As used in the bill, the term "subscriber information" is defined to mean only the names, addresses and telephone numbers contained in the E 9-1-1 provider's database. The confidentiality of this information is expressly protected by language limiting the purposes for which it can be used, and by expressly exempting it from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

Our Office supports the direction of this bill and hopes to see the scope and utility of this program grow over time. During the past several years we have served on a committee convened by the Department of Public Safety's Office of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications to develop a plan to revitalize the 9-1-1 "functional/special needs" database. That database contains information that individuals who have pre-registered want emergency responders to know about their particular functional needs for assistance. When an individual 9-1-1 call is placed by a "special needs" registrant, basic information about the registrant's disability appears on the 9-1-1 dispatcher's computer screen, and can be shared with first responders. Unfortunately, much of the information currently in the database is old, and too few people with needs are currently choosing to register. A renewed effort to publicize and maintain this feature is much needed.

Assuming that appropriate limitations and safeguards are written into law, information from a revitalized Functional/Special Needs database could prove useful to municipal emergency managers who are responsible for preparedness planning. I have recently met with a number of municipal emergency management directors about ways to better include people with disabilities in local and regional emergency planning. Many of them have so little information about the needs of people with disabilities in their towns that it is difficult for them to properly discharge their planning responsibilities. If we could revitalize the 9-1-1 Functional/Special Needs registration program and surround it with the necessary legal framework to protect the confidentiality of registrants' information, its database could be shared with and used by local emergency management directors.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. Our Office will continue to work to ensuring that emergency responses and planning include people with disabilities. If there are any questions that I can help answer, please feel free to contact me.