

Chairman Guerrero, Chairman Maynard, members of the committee, my name is David Hicks. I'm the chairman of the New Haven Commission on Disabilities. It is an honor to speak with you again, because this committee has been instrumental in reforming the laws and regulations governing Disability Parking. Last year, after 3 years of trying to pass comprehensive legislation, but stymied by fiscal notes in Appropriations, this committee pared down the bill to its bare essentials, and got the new law passed. In March of 2010 the first placard was issued since 1999 that had an expiration date on it. That was a big victory for people with disabilities. (And Connecticut got off the list of 3 states with non-expiring placards.) Thank you for your hard work.

I wish I could spend all my time speaking to the positive bills before you today. I first need to address PB 710. This bill says it seeks to limit the burdens on people with disabilities by repealing placard expiration. But just what is the burden? By the design of this committee, DMV now coordinates placard expiration with license expiration, once every 6 years. The process is very low impact. The placard holder has only to check a few boxes and sign a form. I don't view this as a burden, but as my civic duty, in recognition of the accommodation afforded me by the placard. Compare that to the problem of not being able to park when you have a medical appointment, because all the designated parking spaces are taken. That's truly a burden.

There are 4 reasons non-expiring placards are bad: 1) people die, and there is no way to retrieve their placards; 2) some placards get lost or stolen, and wind up in the wrong hands; 3) placards are sometimes issued to people who don't meet the necessary disability criteria; 4) with placards that never expire, you will inevitably reach the point where you have too many placards in circulation, and you can't get rid of them. Instead, you have to keep issuing more.

For brevity's sake I'll give you a summary of some relevant statistics. If you want, I can flesh these out later. At this point, Connecticut has issued somewhere around 400,000 non-expiring placards. If every single person in the state with a mobility disability or who is blind had a placard, there would only be 250,000 placards. That's an excess of at least 150,000 placards. The only way to remove that excess, and to prevent it from growing, is to continue issuing placards with expiration dates. I urge you, please, don't turn your back on your own excellent efforts. Vote no on PB 710.

On the positive side of the ledger, we support HB 5952, which would require a photo of the permit holder on the placard. This and PSB 813, which mandates a pilot program of volunteer assistance in enforcement, take aim at the practical difficulties of enforcing the law. We support any bills that help create a vigorous system of enforcement. A photo on the placard is by far the best means available to help enforce the law. Other states are doing this, including Massachusetts, South Carolina, and New Mexico. You can protect people's privacy, as Massachusetts does, with an optional sleeve. (The issue is covered in OLR report 2010-R-0488.)

In its intent, we support HB 6190 which mandates a 2 week suspension of the driver's license of abusers of the law. But you can't determine this without some means of identifying who the rightful placard holder is, on the placard.

I don't have a bill number, but Rep. Ritter has proposed a bill that would change one of the regulations concerning physician certification of disability. This is the criterion that designates someone who "cannot walk 200 feet with stopping to rest" as having a mobility disability. I have always thought that this might allow for physicians to take a casual approach to certification. Some states have either eliminated this criterion or changed the distance to as little as 50 feet. This is a complex issue with many different viewpoints. One thing is clear: the means by which someone is designated as having a mobility disability should get a thorough review.