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Testimony re: House Bill 5016

**Submitted to the Appropriations Committee/General Government B Subcommittee for
the record to: appropriationtestimo@cga.ct.gov by Nora Duncan, Executive Director**

The Arc Connecticut is a 60-year old advocacy organization committed to protecting the rights of people with intellectual, cognitive, and developmental disabilities and to promoting opportunities for their full inclusion in the life of their communities.

Governor Malloy's has proposed several budget adjustment items that The Arc Connecticut supports fully, such as those that support moves from Southbury Training School to appropriate community based homes, new autism funding and a COLA for private nonprofits provider employees. However, no budget is perfect, especially in these very challenging economic times and we have concerns about Sections 75-82 of House Bill 5016, which consolidates the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA) with the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO).

The very mission of The Arc Connecticut is to advocate for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and anything that compromises the independence of OPA or risks federal safeguards or funding is a significant concern.

The Arc Connecticut opposes the merger. It is important that the head of Protection & Advocacy be an independent voice with credibility and full investigatory powers. There is reason to be concerned about a hierarchical structure that has a head of Protection & Advocacy that is hired and reports to an Executive Director with no input from the disability community. Additionally, there is good reason to question whether or not the merger would violate the federal laws that require independence of the OPA and, therefore, risk much needed federal funding.

The Arc Connecticut appeals to the members of the Committee to fully analyze this proposal and its potential unintended consequences. The comparatively small administrative savings associated with the merger are not enough to justify the potential ramifications of a much weakened Protection & Advocacy authority on individuals with disabilities and their families.

Please do not hesitate to call upon The Arc Connecticut for more information or further clarification of our position.