

February 20, 2012

Testimonial

House Bill 5016 (Sec. 75-82)

This testimony opposes House Bill 5016 (Sec. 75 – 82) which proposes the consolidation of the Office of Protection and Advocacy with the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

Western Connecticut Association for Human Rights, Inc has been advocating for and with people with disabilities for over 30 years. WeCAHR was a result of grass roots advocacy movement deeply rooted in social justice and the civil and human rights of persons with disabilities. We have partnered with The Office of Protection and Advocacy to protect safeguards created to defend persons with disabilities against abuse, neglect and erosion of rights.

The consolidation of OPA with another agency will directly compromise its independence. The merging will result in the dilution in mission for both agencies affected. OPA's mission, created to *safeguard and advance the civil and human rights of people with disabilities in Connecticut* will be subjected to change. Connecticut residents with disabilities would lose the safeguarding and advocacy authority conferred by federal P&A statutes (PADD, PAIMI, PAIR, etc.). OPA would no longer be able to conduct abuse/neglect investigations, pursue legal and administrative remedies, educate policy makers and reach out to traditionally underserved populations under the authority granted by federal P&A law.

The leadership and the staff at OPA have developed the knowledge, resources, network and ballast necessary to represent and protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. The Office of Protection and Advocacy has honored its mission and the promise made to the residents of Connecticut. I urge the Governor and the Appropriations Committee to do the same.

Respectfully submitted by
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