

Connecticut State Advisory Council on Special Education

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION • P.O. BOX 2219 • HARTFORD, CT 06145



March 8, 2012

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Miner and members of the Appropriations Committee, the State Advisory Council on Special Education would like to express its concerns regarding H.B. 5016, which seeks to consolidate the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA) and the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO).

Since 1975 the State Advisory Council on Special Education has been authorized under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to investigate and report unmet needs for Connecticut's special education population to the State Board of Education and to the Connecticut General Assembly.

The proposed merger of the OPA and the CHRO would be detrimental to all individuals with disabilities, especially families of children with disabilities who rely on the OPA to advocate on their behalf. The OPA serves as a valuable resource for parents who cannot afford legal representation and have no where else to turn. These families rely on the OPA to help them find appropriate services and to safeguard their children's rights. In light of continued reports of abuse of children with disabilities in our schools, OPA's existence is, now more than ever, critical and necessary.

Moreover, the CHRO and OPA serve very different functions. For example, the mission of the OPA is to expose instances of patterns of discrimination and abuse of individuals with disabilities, and to empower people with disabilities and their families to advocate effectively. The CHRO's mission is to enforce human rights laws and monitor compliance with laws requiring affirmative action in state agency personnel practices. Consolidation of these two entities makes no sense in light of the fact that they serve very different purposes.

For the reasons set forth above, the SAC opposes H.B. 5016 and urges the Committee to consider the ramifications that the proposed consolidation will have on those who rely on the OPA to protect and safeguard the rights of people with disabilities in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Christine C. Murphy

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Chair
State Advisory Council on Special Education