

Testimony of Muriel Tomer, Naugatuck, CT
Chairperson, PAIMI Council of CT
Opposition to H.B. 5016
March 8, 2012

Madame Chairpersons and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Although I am not able to attend this public hearing in person, due to a non-negotiable prior commitment, I am submitting my testimony in opposition of Raised Bill 5016, and the possibility of consolidation of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (P&A) with the Office of Governmental Accountability (OGA).

In the words of the P&A 2011 Annual Report: "Rights are powerful things in our culture. When we recognize that someone has a rightful place in the world, we are, in essence, acknowledging that person as having a legitimate claim to fair treatment, equal opportunity and common respect. Not because the person may have a particular characteristic, like a disability, but because he or she is a fellow human being, and we, as a society have a commitment to fairness.

People have a right to be free from abuse and neglect, to be included in the civic and cultural life of their communities, to live in a place they can call home, to learn in their public schools, to work and earn a living, to be listened to and have their choices respected by those who would help them. These things are not privileges extended by virtue of some benevolent, paternalistic impulse. They are not dependent on the availability of appropriations or the indulgence of charitable organizations. They are rights – things that, in a just society, must be respected. In Connecticut, the need for safeguards continues, just as the struggle for justice continues. But, the goal – a rightful place – is clear."

We hope you will keep these words in mind as I highlight some of the many reasons why P&A cannot be consolidated into any other entity, risking its loss of authority, federal funding and independence:

In the Year 2011

- P&A received 1115 allegations of suspected abuse or neglect of persons with intellectual disability, resulting in 1,104 cases.
- P&A reviewed or investigated 200 deaths.
- P&A advocates received requests for assistance from 4,078 individuals with disabilities, their family members, and interested parties.
- P&A advocates and attorneys provided representation to 716 individuals with disabilities and submitted amicus briefs before appellate tribunals in cases that raise significant issues of interest to the disability community.
- More than 2,600 individuals received training from P&A events, and over 3200 people received information at 14 resource fairs.
- More than 3,500 people were given the opportunity to register to vote.

The following are examples of issue areas where P&A provided protection and advocacy services to people with disabilities in Connecticut:

Abuse and Neglect	Special Education	Transportation	Employment
Personal Care Services	Housing	Legal	Community Integration
Disaster Preparedness	Accessibility	Access to Services	Healthcare

This information illustrates the protection and advocacy needs in the State of Connecticut. More importantly, it shows why Connecticut's P&A must remain independent, retaining their unique authority and federal funding. Their independence will ensure that the many needs of people with disabilities are consistently met in a timely, authoritative, and vigorous manner. Please do not consolidate the P&A with any other organization. To do so flies in the face of respecting the inherent rights and fairness which constitute a just society – *our society*.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.