

**Environment Committee
Public Hearing
Friday March 22, 2013**

Testimony Opposing HB - 6654

Dear Chairpersons and Committee,

I am testifying in opposition of HB - 6654. , specifically Sec. 3. with regards to the awarding of food vending services in state parks and forests. I am a legally blind entrepreneur, operating a food service facility through the Business Enterprise Program which falls under the direction of the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind. This program exists due to the Randolph-Sheppard Act which allows those who are blind to operate a food service facility, vending machine(s), or stand which sell various items on Federal or State owned, operated, or leased property.

In this Bill, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection would like to side step the Randolph-Sheppard Act and allow the operation of these facilities at State parks and forests to go out to bid. By doing so this would be extremely detrimental to the Business Enterprise Program of the State of Connecticut and more importantly, to the blind entrepreneurs that operate these facilities. Simply put, it would put blind people out of work and their families at a high risk for financial hardship.

We are all aware of the high unemployment rate not only within our own State, but the Country as a whole. We hear every day how difficult the job market is for those who are unemployed, and these are people with sight. If you pass this Bill, you will be putting blind people out of work and where are we to go then? There is no market for us. We are considered a liability and no one wants to take on a "liability".

The Randolph-Sheppard Act has a purpose. The Business Enterprise Program in the State of Connecticut has a purpose. The purpose is to get those who are blind back to work, become contributing members of society and help support our local economy by doing things such as using public transportation to get to and from work on a daily basis for example and let us not forget - to become taxpayers again!

The people who have walked before us have worked extremely hard to put this Randolph-Sheppard Act in place and by a simple affirmative vote of this Environment Committee, you could take that all away from us. We may have lost our sight, but we did not lose our vision. Our vision is to keep fighting for this program because we believe this program works. By passing this Bill you are only encouraging other State agencies to do the same - bully the blind by the power of law. The Randolph-Sheppard Act was put in place to work, not to work around. We understand the need for funds to support the parks, but displacing blind entrepreneurs is not the solution.

As a blind individual I can tell you that we struggle everyday with the fact that our sight has already been taken from us. Please don't take away our opportunity to work as well. I urge you to vote against HB-6654 and keep our jobs in place!

Respectfully Yours,

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