



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR  
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES  
60B WESTON STREET, HARTFORD, CT 06120-1551

## Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities Before the Transportation Committee

Submitted By: Gretchen Knauff  
Assistant Director  
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Good Morning Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero and members of the Transportation Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the status of handicapped parking in Connecticut and proposed bills to modify to Connecticut General Statutes §14-253a. Every year, the legislature addresses bills related to handicapped parking, many of them the same concepts from year to year. The bills on today's agenda are no different.

The Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (P&A) has been addressing handicapped parking issues since the agency was established 35 years ago. People with disabilities, family members, contractors and concerned citizens contact P&A for clarification about the requirements for handicapped parking, to lodge complaints about handicapped parking violations and to seek assistance with individual handicapped parking problems.

Today's bills and handicapped parking issues reported to P&A merit careful input, review, and consideration by people with disabilities and other stakeholders. Rather than repeatedly address the same issues year after year, P&A urges the legislature to step back and appoint a Task Force, the majority of whom are people with disabilities who use parking permits, to gather information about handicapped parking issues, review the statutes, and develop meaningful recommendations to revise Conn.Gen.Stat. §14-253(a), Connecticut's handicapped parking law.

OPA supports the following bills before the Committee: **Proposed Senate Bill 105, An Act Concerning the Enforcement of Parking Restrictions in Areas Reserved for Persons who are Blind or Persons with Disabilities** and **Proposed House Bill 5546, An Act Concerning Violations of Handicapped Parking Laws**. These bills ensure that handicapped parking spaces are available to people with disabilities and discourage misuse of the spaces by requiring police officers to issue tickets to vehicles parked in violation of the handicapped parking laws. Such

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enforcement will cause potential violators to think twice before parking in a handicapped parking space to make that bank deposit, buy a quart of milk or have a place to park during the holiday season. P&A also supports **Proposed Senate Bill 137, An Act Expanding the Issuance of Permits for Parking Spaces Designated for Persons Who Are Blind and Persons with Disabilities to Persons with Certain Mental Disabilities** as long as the person with the mental disability must meet the current eligibility criteria to qualify for a handicapped parking permit.

**Proposed House Bill 5129, An Act Concerning Lifetime Parking Permits for Individuals with Disabilities**, would create lifetime handicapped parking permits for people who are blind or people with permanent disabilities. P&A urges caution in consideration of this bill. In the past, the Department of Motor Vehicles issued permanent handicapped parking permits, many misused by persons other than the person to whom they were issued. Each year, P&A receives calls from frustrated individuals looking to report the misuse of a handicapped parking permit. The callers reported seeing someone get out of a car parked in a handicapped parking space and run into a building. Many of these permits are misused when a grandparent, spouse or other relative passes away. Family members will use the handicapped parking permit rather than destroy it, taking spaces away from people with disabilities who really need them. The current renewal requirement limits this potential misuse by automatically expiring when the individual's license or identification card expires.

Statistical data and the experience of people with disabilities contacting P&A also reveal several other pervasive handicapped parking problems that the agency would encourage the Committee, through a Task Force, to address. These include:

**Spaces and Signage** – The requirements for handicapped parking signs have changed several times, creating confusion about proper wording and making compliance more difficult. The current statutory requirements contain so many elements that very few handicapped parking signs actually meet these requirements. (Attached is a small sample of various signs found at handicapped parking spaces in Connecticut). Signs that do not meet current requirements may still be valid because the sign was proper at the time the parking space was created. The signage confusion can cause enforcement difficulties when determining a handicapped parking violation. A simplification of the statutory language for signage or a clarification about required signage elements is necessary to improve enforcement of violations.

**Overtime Parking** – P&A continues to receive questions about parking meters and overtime parking at handicapped parking spaces. What is overtime at a handicapped parking space? What does the handicapped parking statute mean where it says “unlimited period of time without penalty?” If the parking meter expires, is that overtime parking? If the meter expires, can the person parked in the handicapped parking space receive a ticket? Does the person parking in the space actually need to put money in the meter? If so, how much? The handicapped parking statute needs to be clarified to answer these questions for permit holders, law enforcement and municipalities.

**Parking in the Cross Hatch** – P&A staff members receive reports of cars parked in the crosshatch of handicapped parking spaces. In Connecticut, handicapped parking spaces are required to be 16 feet wide (8' space with 8' of crosshatch) or 15 feet wide (10' space with 5' of crosshatch). The crosshatch provides individuals with disabilities extra space to open a door or a place to lower a lift from an accessible van. Cars parked in the cross hatch prevent the use of the handicapped parking space by an individual with a permit. If an individual parks in the crosshatch after a vehicle is already parked in the handicapped parking space, the person parked in the handicapped parking space may not be able to access his/her vehicle and may be forced to wait until the violator returns.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on the proposed bills related to handicapped parking in Connecticut. P&A urges the Transportation Committee to not only address the proposals issues before it, but to take a thorough look at the entire handicapped parking statute (C.G.S. 14-253(a)) and make lasting changes that make sense for people with disabilities, municipalities, law enforcement and other stakeholders.

Examples of Handicapped Parking Signs in Connecticut

