

Senate Bill 137  
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Good morning. My name is Rebecca Szarmach. I am speaking today in support of Senate Bill 137 and on behalf of my husband, Michael Szarmach. The current law pertaining to handicapped parking allows issuance of a handicapped sticker or placard to those who are blind or have certain physical disabilities. The proposed bill SB 137 would extend this privilege to those having certain mental disabilities.

My husband Michael Szarmach is a disabled veteran. He has Generalized Anxiety Disorder and border-line PTSD, as well as panic disorders, specifically agoraphobia and claustrophobia. A person with a panic or anxiety disorder has a great deal of difficulty with environments that he perceives as being difficult to escape from or to get help. These environments usually include but are not limited to wide-open spaces, shopping malls, airports, etc. Mike's anxiety disorders affect his daily living in many ways. One of these is the way in which he has to plan his outings into the community. Leaving the 'safety-zone' of his vehicle and entering a public place is challenging at best for Mike. Since his disorders are mental, he cannot access handicapped parking spaces. Having to park a distance away and walk to a store or business greatly increases his anxiety level and can easily trigger a panic attack. I usually drive Mike to his appointments or shopping and let him off at the door. If Mike has to drive himself and cannot park close to the building, he has to turn around and come home, thereby missing an appointment or skipping his shopping that day. He also must shop at times of the day when places are least crowded, usually early morning or late evening, so that he can get a parking spot by the entrance. There are many events he cannot attend and places he cannot go because he has to walk a distance from his vehicle. Things that the rest of us take for granted like going to the park, attending a concert or fair, shopping at the mall, etc. are impossible for Mike because of his panic disorders. Being able to park closer to the building would greatly increase Mike's ability to accomplish his activities of daily living. Mike receives psychotherapy for his mental disorders at the VA hospital in West Haven. He has had to cancel appointments with his doctor because he has to park too far away from the building. Ironically, he has to forego the very treatment that helps him with his disorders because of something as seemingly insignificant as access to a parking space. There are many people who suffer from the same types of disorders as Mike. Though we cannot 'see' someone's mental disorder, it can be every bit as debilitating as a physical limitation, sometimes even more so. Extending the criteria for obtaining a handicapped sticker to those with mental disabilities would improve the quality of life for those who suffer from these disorders. In conclusion I would like to thank Senator Doyle for sponsoring this bill and encourage you to pass Senate Bill 137.