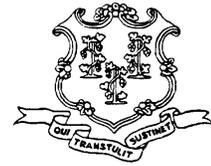




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES



Department of Rehabilitation Services
Testimony before the Environment Committee
Senate Bill 1061 - March 11, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Kennedy and Representative Albis and distinguished members of the Environment Committee. My name is Amy Porter and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services or DORS. I am offering this testimony **in opposition to Section 6 of Senate Bill 1061**, An Act Concerning the Fiscal Sustainability of State Parks.

If enacted, this bill would put three business people with blindness out of work. It would also prevent any other of our clients who are blind to take their place or anyone else who is blind to start any other business at any DEEP facility or park ever again. While we understand that this is not the purpose of this bill, it will be the result.

Since the 1940's, it has been the policy of the Connecticut General Assembly to help people who are blind by giving them the first right to operate a gift shop or newsstand or food service at any state or municipal property. This mirrors the even earlier national Randolph-Sheppard law which still provides the same opportunities on federal properties. If Senate Bill 1061, Section 6 is passed into law, it will be the first restriction on this law's benefits in Connecticut since its enactment over 65 years ago. We urge the Committee to re-consider.

35 clients of DORS who are blind operate businesses on government properties in the state today. Many, many more have benefited from this opportunity over the decades. Our agency and our clients remain committed to earning their livings by providing good service and good quality to their customers. We are also committed to working with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and its staff on an ongoing basis to perfect that service and the experience of Connecticut park patrons.

We understand the struggles and challenges that exist for our state parks. We do want to help improve the future of the Connecticut park experience. Please invite us to join that effort for the future rather than excluding us and making our clients pay with their futures and their livelihoods.

I want to thank the Committee for your attention to this important request. We are, of course, available for any further consultation in this matter.