

**Environment Committee  
Public Hearing  
Wednesday March 11, 2015**

Testimony Opposing SB 1061

Dear Chairpersons and Committee,

I am testifying in opposition of SB 1061, specifically Section 6 and subsection (e) 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 Department of Rehabilitation Services and Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (DORS-BESB). This program exists due to the Randolph-Sheppard Act dating back to the 1940's which allows those who are blind or legally blind an opportunity to operate a food service facility, vending machines, or dry 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 not allow DORS-BESB the right of first refusal to operate these facilities in state parks. By doing so this would be extremely detrimental to the Business Enterprise Program in 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.

Furthermore, the Bill states that in lieu of "following the law" they would make a payment of ten percent of the revenue generated from any contract for the operation of any food concessions at any state park. This defeats the whole purpose of our program AND the Randolph-Sheppard Act!! We as blind individuals are not looking to have a payment made to any particular state agency.....WE WANT TO WORK - that is the point and that is our purpose!!

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 leave these sections in this Bill, you will be putting blind people out of work and there is nowhere for us to go. 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. And let us not forget - to become taxpayers again!

As blind individuals we may have lost our sight but we have not lost our vision. Our vision is to keep fighting for this program because we believe this program works. This law has been in place since 1945 and those 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. 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 who are working hard to provide for their families 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 jobs as well. I urge you to omit Section 6 and subsection (e) from SB 1061 and keep our jobs in place!

Respectfully Yours,

Keith M. Haley  
Blind Entrepreneur  
Elm Street Grille