

Testimony for Veterans' Affairs Committee
PUBLIC HEARING
Tuesday, February 17, 2015

Sarah L. Hamby

118 Viens Street, Putnam, CT 06259 (860) 315-7303 *SarahLHamby@gmail.com*

Proposed H.B. No. 6385 AN ACT PROVIDING FREE ADMISSION TO AND PARKING AT STATE PARKS FOR CONNECTICUT VETERANS. (VA)

Good afternoon, Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. My name is Sarah L. Hamby and I am a veteran of the United States Army, 1994 - 1999. I currently serve as the Adjutant for American Legion Post 13, in Putnam, Connecticut.

I'm sorry I cannot be there to address the committee personally. I hope you will still give some credit to my testimony.

I am writing today in favor of House Bill 6385, a bill that would expand the benefit of free entry to and parking at state parks, forests and recreational facilities to all veterans.

Currently, disabled veterans do have free access to these facilities – this bill would expand that benefit to all who have served.

The Disabled Veteran Pass provides access to the State Parks and Forests and is available free to Connecticut residents who have a service connected disability.

Additionally, The Charter Oak Pass provides access to the State Parks and Forests and is available free to Connecticut residents, 65 years of age or older.

This is a bill that I spoke to my senator, Mae Flexer, about some ago. I spoke to her as a veteran who frequents our state's parks – hiking and taking pictures, enjoying what our state has to offer. My photographs can be seen in local calendars and have won several awards at local fairs, are popular on local websites, etc.

I began hiking as a way of getting in shape. Hiking burns a lot of calories. I was used to wearing boots and carrying a backpack. I also liked the idea of getting away and enjoying the trail.

But I also spoke to Senator Flexer as a veteran who, though I did work multiple part time jobs last year while earning my degree in Human Services, made just over \$6,000. Total.

I support our state parks and recreational facilities. But accessing them can be expensive – particularly for those who don't have the time, or the interest, in finding a trailhead. I've been to our free parks – Old Furnace is a favorite. I support Free State Parks Weekend in July.

I looked in to getting a season pass. \$67. That's twice what I made in January. There are other veterans like me.

According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities:

State Table: Veterans in Households Receiving SNAP Benefits, 2009 to 2011

State	Estimated Number of Veterans Receiving SNAP
Alabama	29,700
Alaska	4,500
Arizona	40,100
Arkansas	19,000
California	82,800
Colorado	17,900
Connecticut	10,200

Access to our beautiful parks can be costly:

<u>Bigelow Hollow State Park</u>	\$ 9.00
<u>Hopeville Pond State Park and Campground</u>	\$ 9.00
<u>Mashamoquet Brook State Park and Campground</u>	\$ 9.00
<u>Rocky Neck State Park and Campground</u>	\$ 13.00
<u>Sleeping Giant State Park</u>	\$ 9.00

I need to go hiking.

In September, there was an article in the Wall-Street Journal. "War "Veterans Try Yoga, Hiking, Horseback Riding to Treat PTSD: Pressure Builds on Department of Veterans Affairs to Expand Range of Treatments Beyond Drugs and Talk Therapy"

In November 2013, in The Army Times, a piece entitled, ' Trail therapy: Vets find peace 'walking off war' on epic Appalachian hike.'

I am not a war-veteran.

But soldiers often have personal battles best left on the trail.

According to the Washington Post, only 6% of Connecticut residents are veterans, many of them from WWII. In fact, nearly half of our state's vets are over 65. Very few of Connecticut's veterans served in the Gulf War.

That means that the fiscal impact of this bill would be very low.

Little fiscal impact. High return for those this bill serves. I urge your approval and passage of this bill.

Thank you.