



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES



Department of Rehabilitation Services

Testimony before the Public Health Committee

SB 296 - AAC the Provision of Healthy Food in Vending Machines Operated on State Property and Recommendations of the Child Obesity Task Force.

March 2, 2016

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Markley, Representative Srinivasan and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Amy Porter. I am the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding Senate Bill 296, *AAC the Provision of Healthy Food in Vending Machines Operated on State Property and Recommendations of the Child Obesity Task Force*. Our agency very much supports the aim of this legislation to ensure a healthier population and joins in recognizing that eating habits do play a significant role in the overall health of each and every one of us. However, we do want to suggest that Section 1 of the bill is not necessary at this time. Further, the mandates in Section 1 will add an administrative strain on our agency's resources and staff at a time when we need very much to focus ourselves on the core mission and work of the department.

One reason we feel that the study and report required in Section 1 is unnecessary is that our agency is already taking action in the area of healthier food choices. Just recently, we filled a vacancy in our Business Enterprise Program (BEP), the program which oversees vending machines as well as cafeterias and snack shops run by persons who are blind. That new Field Representative is specifically charged with promoting healthier food choices in our vending machines and in the businesses run by our operators with blindness. While this is a relatively new initiative, we are confident that we will be able to make great strides in giving our customers the types of healthy choices they both want and are growing to expect.

We feel it is also important to point out that much of the study and information-gathering called for in Section 1 will pull our staff away from their core mission of supporting and serving our clients with blindness. An in-depth survey as called for in the bill will be extremely difficult to achieve within existing staffing levels; we oversee over 1,700 vending machines in over 700 locations across the state. These machines are operated under a statewide contract by one vendor but much of the work is carried out by a dozen different subcontractors, all with varying protocols of service and methods of data collection. In many cases, much of the data does not exist and would not be easily available as called for in the study.

Since we are already moving forward to provide healthier food options and this bill will drain additional, valuable hours away from our clients, we respectfully request that you take no action on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My office is available for any questions that you may have.