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**GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE**  
**Testimony regarding Governor's HB 5050**  
**An Act Modernizing the Symbol of Access for Persons with Disabilities**  
**February 22, 2016**

Senator Cassano, Rep. Jutila, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Cathy Ludlum, and I am here to express my concerns about Governor's HB 5050. While adopting a new symbol may be intended to give disability a more positive image, I would like us to slow down and think about all the issues involved.

**First of all, the proposed symbol splits the disability community.** It splits between people who are admired for their athletic abilities; and those of us whose contributions may be less visible, but are no less important. It splits between people who want to show success through motion, and those of us who do not push our own wheelchairs and therefore feel criticized by the symbol that should empower us. And it splits between person-first language, in which the device or the disability is a separate part of the self; and identity-first language, in which our disabilities pervade and even enhance the people we are. Passions run high on both sides. But we need to ask ourselves whether it is wise to make a change for the sake of change, when many of us feel disenfranchised by the new symbol.

**Second, the state of Connecticut has many urgent issues that need to be dealt with,** not the least of which is how to make the budget work while doing the least harm to individuals and families. People with disabilities already face long waiting lists for residential and vocational services, independent living centers are on the chopping block, and state agencies are being asked to trim mental health and social services beyond the bone. This upbeat new symbol does nothing to solve these problems. Instead, it is a distraction.

**Finally, Connecticut does not have the authority to change the symbol.** The Americans with Disabilities Act and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) require the International Symbol of Access (ISA). Until another symbol is deemed to have equivalent facilitation, using anything else puts the state out of compliance. The ISA may not represent every type and level of disability either, but its sole purpose is to convey information. It has done that effectively for over 40 years, and is recognized around the world.

A better way to modernize Connecticut's signs (and legislative language in general) would be to **replace the archaic word "handicapped" with "reserved."** This non-controversial change is buried in Section 5 of this bill. My suggestion would be to bring that part of the proposal forward and let the rest go until consensus can be reached.

Thank you for your time today.