



State of Connecticut
Department of Aging and Disability Services

Testimony before the Human Services Committee

Amy Porter – Commissioner

March 25, 2021

Senate Bill 1055, An Act Concerning the Department of Aging and Disability Services

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Berthel, Representative Case and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee - my name is Amy Porter and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS). I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify in support of Senate Bill 1055, An Act Concerning the Department of Aging and Disability Services, ADS's agency bill for this session. I also want to thank the Committee for raising this bill in our behalf.

This bill makes several small adjustments to our statutes - it merges three duplicative statutory provisions into one, brings the language concerning our Assistive Technology loan program for persons with disabilities up to date with best practice and federal guidance, modernizes a particular accommodation for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, streamlines certain appointments to the Advisory Board for Persons Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing and makes other, very technical changes to our statutes.

Sections 1, 2 and 7 of the bill streamline our statutes by merging three duplicative sections into just one. Members of the committee may recall that our agency is the product of the merger of several former agencies. Prior to the creation of our agency, the former Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) and the former Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) each had provisions allowing them to accept gifts and bequests for the benefit of their clients and programs. Since the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, also part of ADS, itself had such a gift-giving provision, our agency now has three such provisions in our statutes. Sections 1, 2 and 7 combined would reduce those three sections to just one, which is all that is needed.

Section 3 of the bill brings the statute governing our Assistive Technology revolving loan program up to date with best practice. When the program was started, under the guidelines of the statute, the agency would lend money directly to persons with disabilities so they could purchase much-needed assistive equipment to help with work and everyday life. More recently, the agency has recognized that the program can work better if we guarantee loans issued by a partnering bank instead of making those loans ourselves. First, this new method allows the program to leverage more total dollars for lending. Second, it uses the greater expertise of an established lending institution for overall program efficiency. Last, this change allows the borrowers, in using a bank, to establish and enhance their personal credit which did not happen when the agency was the direct lender. This change in method has the support of our federal government partners as well as the support of our consumers through the Connecticut Tech Act Program Advisory Council.

Section 4 of the bill seeks to modernize a method for educating persons who are deaf or hard of hearing about applying to become a voter. Current law, CGS Section 9-20(c), tells our agency to produce a “videotape” that explains the application process in sign language. That law dates from 1989 when videotapes were at the forefront of technology. Our agency, in consultation with the office of the Secretary of the State and Disability Rights Connecticut as well as with members of the deaf and hard of hearing community, feels that this task can be accomplished with a video that can be shared online. We are pleased to report that we have already produced one with the generous help of the American School for the Deaf. With this bill, we propose replacing “videotape” with “accessible version.” This change will provide maximum flexibility to respond to and use any changes in technology that may occur in the future.

Section 5 of the bill streamlines the appointment process for the Advisory Board for Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Under current law, the governor appoints all 16 members of the Board. Also according to statute, eight of the 16 members serve on the board by virtue of their outside positions, for example, being the president of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf or the executive director of the American School for the Deaf. Like all members, these *ex officio* members require letters of appointment from the governor. Since these members owe their Board membership to their positions rather than to any discretionary selection, we propose that their membership should begin when they assume that outside position. Under the bill, these eight members will no longer require a letter of appointment and the Governor’s office will be relieved of an unnecessary task. The *ex officio* members will therefore be able to begin their active participation on the Board more quickly. The other eight members will remain discretionary appointments of the governor.

Section 6 deletes a statutory reference to CGS Sec. 46a-30 since that section of the statutes is deleted in Section 7 of this bill.

Section 7 of the bill deletes a now out-of-date reference (CGS Sec. 17a-301b) to the Department of Social Services (DSS) taking over the programs of the former Department on Aging. Since the time when that language was enacted, the legislature has decided (see Public Act 18-169) that our agency would assume the programs and responsibilities of the Department on Aging. Section also deletes CGS Sec. 46a-30 since that section is one of the duplicative sections I discussed earlier regarding the ability of our agency to receive gifts.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. I thank the committee for its time and cooperation on this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.