

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-301
AN ACT REQUIRING THE PROVISION OF ALL-TERRAIN WHEELCHAIRS AT
Title: STATE PARKS.
Vote Date: 3/10/2023
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations
PH Date: 2/27/2023
File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To provide all-terrain wheelchairs for use by the public at state parks

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie S. Dykes Commissioner, Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

DEEP supports the concept and looks forward to providing all terrain wheelchairs but we are concerned that this bill provides overly specific requirements that may delay or complicate our efforts and exceed the budget currently allocated. For this program to run safely and efficiently, DEEP will also need to provide safety and operations training for users and set up a maintenance program to ensure wheelchairs continue to operate correctly.

Jordan A. Scheff, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Developmental Services

Connecticut Department of Developmental Services supports SB 301. Allowing persons with disabilities (and specifically for those persons who have intellectual disability) to have access to recreational opportunities that are now unavailable to them will have a positive impact on their health and well-being and their enjoyment of life in Connecticut.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Ann Gadwah, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer, Sierra Club Connecticut

Sierra Club supports SB 301. They believe in the right of outdoor access for all and this would significantly help those who have been limited to where they can go by mobility issues.

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Connecticut Forest & Park Association supports this initiative strongly and advocating for additional field staff in the State Parks division to make sure there are ample staff resources to ensure the success of this program. States like Georgia, who make all-terrain wheelchairs available at certain State Parks, utilize partnership with a private foundation to ensure the program is well-resourced and successful.

Sen. Cathy Osten, 19th District

Sen. Osten supports SB 301. The ability of those challenged to access state parks and state forests is simply put, a right of access issue. This would be life changing for those who enjoy outside activities but have been limited as to where they are able to travel.

Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council

Connecticut Land Conservation Council supports SB 301. All-terrain wheelchairs ensure that every wheelchair user or others with mobility challenges can explore the outdoors with little to no restrictions.

Rick Newton, Citizen of Connecticut

Mr. Newton supports SB 301 with the provisions that the legislature provide additional and adequate funding to implement the pilot program to acquire all-terrain wheelchairs.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Thomas Olson, Citizen of Connecticut

Mr. Olson opposes SB 301 not because he doesn't support the state providing better access to the parks, but he feels that the bill, as written, is much too targeted, and would likely result in 10 vehicles sitting in a garage and not being used. He feels that DEEP should provide the specifications for the specific vehicles allowed in each park, so individuals could purchase and use their own.

Reported by: Judith Ganswindt

Date: March 15, 2023