

**Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
Before the Transportation Committee**

**Presented by: James D. McGaughey
Executive Director
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Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to comment on several of the bills on your agenda today:

Raised Bill No.499, AN ACT CONCERNING PARKING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. This bill would require that removable handicapped parking placards display an expiration date along with other identifying information including the signature of the owner, and would establish a process for periodic renewal. It also would create new alternative complaint and enforcement mechanisms for violations of handicapped parking rules.

Establishing an expiration and renewal process for handicapped parking placards could help ensure that placards are only being used by those who actually need them and qualify for them. Our Office supports this goal. The bill proposes to tie placard expiration and renewal to the expiration and renewal cycle for operators' licenses. For people with disabilities who drive themselves, this would probably work well. However, not all placard-holders have operator's licenses. Some own or use vehicles that are operated by aides, friends or family members; some placards are issued to parents who drive their children who have disabilities. Under current law, placards may also be issued to organizations that use their vehicles primarily to transport individuals who are blind or who have physical disabilities. To cover these situations, an alternative expiration and renewal schedule tied to the vehicle registration cycle would probably provide a useful alternative.

I would also note that some individuals with disabilities who are entitled to placards may not be physically able to affix their signatures as required in both current law and Section 1(a) of the bill. Others may object to having their names or other personally identifying information displayed on the placard due to concerns about personal safety and identity security. (These concerns would be exacerbated by including drivers' license identification numbers and expiration dates on the placards. Drivers' licenses typically expire on drivers' birthdates.) I appreciate that requiring a signature, or at least some type of personally identifying information on the placard is intended to reduce the likelihood of unauthorized use. However, the disadvantages of this requirement may outweigh the benefits, and I would urge that if this bill goes forward that the requirement for signature or other easily read personally identifying information be deleted.

Raised Bill No. 5735, AN ACT CONCERNING INDIVIDUALS WHO TRANSPORT PATIENTS OR CLIENTS UNDER THE CARE, CONTROL OR CUSTODY OF A STATE AGENCY, AND THE VEHICLES USED BY SUCH INDIVIDUALS TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES.

This bill reflects lessons learned from a tragic accident that took the life of a young man who was a client of the Department of Developmental Services. It focuses on two things: 1) ensuring that persons entrusted to drive clients of state human service agencies have valid driver's licenses appropriate to the type of vehicle being used; and 2), ensuring that there are operable seat belts in all vehicles used to transport state clients, and that drivers are, in fact, trained in how to properly use them.

These provisions might seem like obvious steps, but they are too important to leave to chance. Institutionalizing them in statute would help to safeguard vulnerable people, and our Office supports doing so. I would point out, however, that many clients of state-funded service systems are actually served through community provider organizations. The impact on these providers needs to be considered, and practical ways need to be developed to ensure the clients who would be transported by them are safe. While the language referring to licensing and training extends to any individual "utilized by a state agency to transport patients or clients", and thus would seem to include employees of private provider organizations, it may not be practical to require that "the state" perform all the monthly inspections on provider owned vehicles that would be required by paragraph (c). As an alternative, monthly inspections of the condition of seat belts and other safety equipment in private provider vehicles could be completed by the private agency's personnel, using protocols and maintaining documentation on forms supplied by the licensing or contracting state agency.

Raised Bill No. 5734, AN ACT CONCERNING NEW AND EXPANDED BUS TRANSPORTATION SERVICES THROUGHOUT CONNECTICUT. This bill calls for establishing a "Buses for 21st Century Mobility" program designed to expand various categories of bus service, including services for people with disabilities. The program would make available seven million dollars in operating funds and fifteen million dollars in bond proceeds for this purpose. It is particularly heartening to see that up to 75% of the funds that would be available for capital expenditures could be spent on busses and smaller vehicles, including vehicles for ADA services, elder service and services for rural areas, and that at least one-third of funds for vehicle purchase are to be spent to provide service in rural areas. Whenever our Office or one of our partner agencies conducts public forums to identify issues affecting people with disabilities in different parts of the state, we are presented with multiple complaints about the inadequacy of accessible transportation. The problems are especially acute in rural areas. As more people with disabilities seek to live independently and to join the workforce, and as more baby boomers are choosing to "age in place", we need to invest additional resources in accessible public transportation. The program envisioned in this proposal represents a significant commitment in that direction, and I urge you to support it.

Thank you for your attention. If there are any questions, I will try to answer them.