STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
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Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
For the Committee on Human Services
March 6, 2007

Submitted by James D. McGaughey
Executive Director

Thank you for considering our Office's comments in support of several of the bills on your agenda today. These are:

Raised Bill No. 1337, AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION AWARDS RECEIVED BY PERSONS WHO HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED BY STATE HUMANE INSTITUTIONS This bill builds on current statutory provisions that protect damages awards in discrimination cases brought by people who have received certain state benefits. It would include people who have received treatment and care in State operated or sponsored human service programs. Most of these people have psychiatric or developmental disabilities.

Under current law, if a beneficiary of various enumerated State financial assistance programs are awarded damages in a discrimination case, that person does not have to use the awards to reimburse the State for benefits he or she has received. This existing exemption applies to recipients of the State Supplement to SSI, Medicaid, family and general assistance programs, and to people who have received assistance with relocation expenses connected with condominium conversions and housing code enforcement. These exemptions recognize that people with limited financial means are among the most vulnerable to discriminatory treatment. They further an underlying public policy goal of encouraging people who have experienced discriminated to pursue complaints. Without these exemptions, however, people who have received State benefits would face the "Catch-22" disincentive of having to turn over any damages awarded as a result of their complaints to repay the State for their past benefits.

It is fundamentally unfair that this same policy does not extend to people who have received services through the Departments of Mental Retardation, Mental Health and Addiction Services and Children and Families. People with disabilities frequently encounter discrimination in housing, employment and other areas of life. I urge you to support this measure.

Raised Bill No. 7109, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTIFICATION STANDARDS FOR PERSONS PROVIDING INTERPRETER SERVICES; and Raised Bill 7301, AN ACT CONCERNING THE AVAILABILITY OF QUALIFIED INTERPRETER SERVICES update and clarify the statutes that define and provide for qualified interpreters for deaf people in certain legal and administrative proceedings. R.B.7109 updates references to both the fundamental definition of interpreter services and to the various certification mechanisms by which interpreters become credentialed. R.B. 7301 makes it clear that deaf people are entitled to interpreter services when dealing with the courts, criminal investigations and administrative agency proceedings. I urge your support of these measures.

Thank you for considering these comments. If there are any questions, please let me know and I will try to get you answers.