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DAVID HICKS
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
July 14, 2008

Present: Dana Canevari, David Hicks, Stan Kontogiannis, Elaine Quinn, Matthew Ranelli
Linda Reeder, Heiwa Salovitz, Delma Skinner, Robin Tousey-Ayers

Absent: Chris Getlein

Staff: Michelle Duprey

Guests: Robert Ward, Commissioner DMV, Senator Donald DeFronzo

David Hicks brought the meeting to order. The guests were introduced and welcomed. Commissioner Ward had served many years in the legislature and was a house minority leader prior to his appointment as Commissioner. Senator DeFronzo is the Chairman of the Transportation Committee. Both of the guests were invited in order to discuss the issue of designated parking for people with disabilities. David Hicks presented the background on the legislative proposal (Senate Bill 499) which would have passed this year had it not been for a fiscal note the commission considered overstated. David Hicks had several questions to ask. He stated the current system is broken and asked the guests to commit to its reform.

Commissioner Ward agreed there are huge problems with the current system and that the number of placards, given the population, seemed inappropriate and agreed there is abuse of the parking placards. He stated the bill itself linking the placard to the drivers license or ID is conceptually fine, but logistically they have never been linked and the Legacy computer systems do not communicate with each other. He said another one of the problems is to create an exceptions process as there can be problems for people wanting the non-driver ID. There was further explanation of the programmatic aspects and costs related to a new program.

There was a discussion regarding physician verification. It was determined that the state does no checking on verifying physicians, and David Hicks and Michelle Duprey suggested the program might benefit from including random-sampling checks of physicians. Commissioner Ward stated that DMV is working on a way for physicians to submit verification electronically which could then save time entering data and it would be searchable. The Commission members agreed this would be a positive development. David Hicks made further comment regarding penalty for false statements by physicians, which is perjury in Massachusetts. Commissioner Ward stated that there is a similar penalty on the state's existing form. It was brought to his attention by Michelle Duprey that any doctor can sign the forms and there is no requirement that a certifying doctor treats the applicant for their disability, i.e. a dermatologist could sign for a person with a mobility disability. Michelle Duprey talked about the State's responsibility which has parallels to para-transit obligation.

David Hicks talked about the federal regulations adopted by the state that are used to certify mobility disability, and specifically the regulation qualifying people who are unable to walk 200 foot without stopping to rest. He stated that the 200 foot regulation is a loop hole, and pointed out that Illinois has struck that provision from their regulations entirely, and several other states have changed the distance to 50 or 100 feet. He said that the federal regulations are not binding on the states and suggested Connecticut change the distance to 50 feet.

Michelle Duprey stated that during her training of local police, when she has asked about enforcement of the placards, they stated that the database has been a reason for lack of law enforcement. In New Haven, the Parking Authority issues most parking tickets and has no access to the system to check if the placards are being used appropriately. Commissioner Ward said that it is not within DMV authority to determine who has access to the database. Currently it is only accessible to law enforcement.

David Hicks talked about the system that is in place in Massachusetts. The towns and cities hire off-duty police officers for four hour details and pay them \$150 to enforce accessible parking requirements. They carry laptops to access photos of the permit holders and check drivers using placards against these photos. He produced a document, as an example, from the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) showing that in the last 10 months the town of Waltham, population 55,000, had taken in fines totaling \$220,000 for infractions of the Handicapped Parking laws. Thus the system pays for itself. David Hicks suggested that such a system could work in Connecticut and perhaps the fines collected could be split between the state and the municipalities. This would help defray the expense of running the program.

Commissioner Ward stated that they have a study group to look at this issue and he will take it up at next month's meeting. He thinks that at least they could implement the electronic filing of doctor applications and that he now understands the connection between the placard and the driver's license or the non-driver ID.

Senator DeFronzo spoke about the bill. He said it was a good piece of legislation, however there still is what he called the "money issue," i.e. how to fund the bill. He responded to the information about Massachusetts's enforcement by saying he would consult with police organizations, because there has been little enforcement up to this point. David Hicks took up the "money issue," pointing out that Massachusetts has almost twice the population of Connecticut yet the RMV employs only six full time clerks working on designated parking, and these people work on other issues as well. Yet the fiscal note that killed SB 499 specified the program would require 14 full-time people working on this issue alone.

Commissioner Ward stated that the number of employees specified (14) was determined based on the existing pool of permits (upwards of 350,000), and that he understood that this number was probably not accurate going forward. David Hicks suggested that they take a look at what Massachusetts and other organizations are doing to reduce the number.

Matthew Rannelli spoke on the issue. He agrees with David Hicks regarding the high number of placards which represent an abuse. He suggested that DMV dig deeper into the assumptions made by the Office of Fiscal Analysis in order to bring the fiscal note amount down, and asked that the Department look at what staffing levels were required to meet this obligation before lifetime permits began being issued in 2000.

There was more discussion of the fiscal note, especially the ongoing costs of a program which Commissioner Ward admitted was handling approximately 18,000 permits per year. There was also some discussion about counterfeit placards and people claiming they are lost or stolen. The majority of Commission members agreed that only one placard and not two should be given out to each permit holder. (This also uncovered the fact that the state, in citing 343,000 placards issued, counts issuing 2 placards to one individual as a single placard.) There was also discussion about what the new placards should look like. Michelle Duprey also made a suggestion about informing the consumer about what they cannot do with the placard. Commissioner Ward was reluctant to add what he considered too much verbiage to the existing advice given to placard holders.

The discussion began to wrap up and the guests left.

Previous meeting Minutes

Robin Tousey Ayes moved to accept the minutes as written, which was seconded by Heiwa and unanimously approved.

Old Business

The rain location for the Spokebenders ADA Celebration event will be at Wilbur Cross High school; otherwise it will be on the New Haven Green on July 22. Michelle Duprey said she would get a press release out through the Mayors office. Linda Reeder said she would update the poster to indicate the rain location.

Announcements

Heiwa Salovitz talked about the film "Music Within" which was recently shown at the Elm Street Public Library. Heiwa Salovitz also commented on the International Arts and Ideas Festival, in which he and Dana Canevari participated.

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting which was unanimously approved.