

Legislative History for Connecticut Act

HB 8251 PA 279 (PA) 1973

Sen: 2299, 2344

House: 3655-3657

Sub. Health & Safety: 349-364

21 pages

Transcripts from the Joint Standing Committee Public Hearing(s) and/or Senate  
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CONNECTICUT  
GEN.ASSEMBLY  
SENATE

PROCEEDINGS  
1973

VOL.16  
PART 5  
1985-2473

May 1, 1973

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C.G.C.

Of course. The Bill will pass temporarily and come back to the Bill.

THE CLERK:

Calendar No. 568, File No. 368. Substitute for House Bill No. 8251, an act concerning the rights of the blind and otherwise physically disabled. Favorable report of the Committee on Public Health and Safety.

SENATOR BERRY:

Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

I'm sorry. Senator Berry. Senator Berry.

SENATOR BERRY:

Mr. President, I move acceptance of the Committee's favorable report and passage of this Bill.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark.

SENATOR BERRY:

Yes, Mr. President. This Bill will encourage and enable the blind and otherwise physically disabled to participate fully in a social and economic life of the State and to engage in remunerative employment and I urge its passage on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Motion is to the Consent Calendar. Is there objection?

Hearing none, so ordered.

THE CLERK:

Calendar No. 569, File No. 574 and 353. House Bill No. 8252.

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C.G.C.

I move the following--I move adoption, acceptance, passage and other appropriate action on the following items on the Consent Calendar if amended, where amended, that would be appropriate as well: Calendar No. 693...

THE CHAIR:

You'd never get away with all that in Court, you know.

SENATOR ROME:

I do. Calendar No. 694, Calendar No. 518, Calendar No. 544, Calendar No. 565, Calendar No. 568, Calendar No. 570; it's my understanding 569 is pass retained?

THE CHAIR:

Resolutions adopted on the Consent Calendar HJR-175 & HJR-176.

That's correct.

Bills passed on the Consent Calendar SB-1946, SB-1870, HB-8973, HB-8251, HB-8413, SB-1715, SB-2181, SB-2184, SB-2216, SB-2276, SB-2281, SB-1673, SB-1970, SB-2164, SB-2114, SB-1586, SB-1569, SB-1891, HB-9132, HB-8623, HB-8860, HB-9007, HB-8733, HB-8734, HB-8578, HB-8813, HB-9020, HB-9066, HB-8425, HB-8460.

SENATOR ROME:

Calendar No. 588, 590...

THE CHAIR:

HB-8462, HB-8847, HB-9189, HB-9339, HB-8318, HB-8558, HB-8324.

589?

SENATOR ROME:

589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 596, 597, 598, 600, 601, 603, 606--excuse me--I did it again--620, 621, 622, 623, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, and 407.

THE CHAIR:

Motion is by the Majority Leader for adoption of the Consent Calendar. Is there any objection to any--all the items noted? Hearing none, the Consent Calendar is adopted.

SENATOR ROME:

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this piece of legislation is not an anti-labor bill. It is, therefore sir, a very good bill. I would not only urge the Chamber to support this bill. I would respectfully urge you, Mr. Speaker, to support this bill.

djh

THE GUEST SPEAKER:

I'll take it under advisement! Are there any other remarks? If not, will you take your seats and will the staff clear the aisle. Will the Clerk announce a roll call vote please. The machine will be open. Has everyone voted that wishes to vote? The gentleman from the 23rd will be recorded in the affirmative, please. Has everyone voted that wishes to vote? Will the Clerk take a tally please.

THE ASSISTANT CLERK:

Total number voting.....	123
Necessary for passage.....	62
Those voting Yea.....	123
Those voting Nay.....	0
Those absent and not voting.....	28

THE GUEST SPEAKER:

The joint committee's favorable report is accepted and the bill is PASSED.

THE CLERK:

On page 6 of your Calendar, Calendar No. 388, your File No. 368, substitute for H.B. No. 8251, An Act Concerning the Rights of the Blind and Otherwise Physically Disabled, favorable report of the Committee on Public Health & Safety.

MR. SAYRE (68th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move the acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

THE GUEST SPEAKER:

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Question is on acceptance of the committee's favorable report and passage of the bill. Will you remark? djh

MR. SAYRE (68th):

Yes, Mr. Speaker. H.B. No. 8251 can rightfully be titled civil rights for the blind and otherwise physically disabled. The purpose of this bill is to clarify the rights to the blind in our state. This bill will eliminate discrimination of blind persons in the areas of housing, employment and public accommodation. It will also levy a penalty for the discrimination against the blind and render discrimination a Class C felony with a fine of up to \$100 or not more than sixty day imprisonment or both. Regarding housing and public accommodations, the blind will be protected under this bill if they comply with the provisions of section 3 which in part states: any blind person shall be entitled to visit any place of public accommodation, resort or amusement as a guest of the lawful occupant thereof accompanied by his guide dog and he may keep such guide dog with him at all times in such public accommodations, resort or amusement at no extra charge provided such dog is in harness. It further states that the person shall be liable for any damage done to the premises or facilities by such guide dog. Regarding employment, this bill will protect the rights of the blind if they are otherwise qualified for employment. The bill also instructs the Governor to proclaim White Cane Day on October 15 of each year in recognition of these good citizens of the State of Connecticut. It's a good bill. I recommend its adoption.

THE GUEST SPEAKER:

Question is on acceptance and passage. Will you remark further?

MR. KABLIK (29th):

Mr. Speaker, I won't elaborate because this creates a long day

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but I just want to indicate that I was present in the Chamber when the hearing was held right here and it was a very impressive one and the extremely needed and great bill.

djh

THE GUEST SPEAKER:

Will you remark further? If not, will you take your seats, staff clear the aisle, clerk take a vote.

MR. MORRIS (25th):

A question, Mr. Speaker. In your humble opinion, would it be a conflict of interest if I sit here and voted on this bill?

THE GUEST SPEAKER:

If anyone claims there is, I'll rule them out of order. Has everyone voted that cares to vote? The gentleman from the 23rd will be recorded in the affirmative. Will the Clerk take a tally.

MR. WEBBER (92nd):

Will you please record my vote in the affirmative, Mr. Speaker.

THE GUEST SPEAKER:

The gentleman from the 92nd is not listed as voted and wants to be recorded in the affirmative. Has everyone voted that wants to cast their vote? Will the Clerk announce the tally.

THE ASSISTANT CLERK:

Total number voting.....	117
Necessary for passage.....	59
Those voting Yea.....	117
Those voting Nay.....	0
Those Absent and Not Voting...	34

THE GUEST SPEAKER:

The joint committee's favorable report is accepted and the bill is PASSED.

THE CLERK:

JOINT  
STANDING  
COMMITTEE  
HEARINGS

PUBLIC HEALTH  
& SAFETY

1973

PRESIDING: SEN. L. BERRY  
REP. V. CONNOLLY

SENATORS: TRUEX

REPRESENTATIVES: KABLIK, DR. COHEN, OSIECKI, CLARK  
GOSSELIN, MORRISON, WILBER, YACAVONE  
EVILIA, ROSE

SEN. BERRY: We'd like to begin the hearing of the Public Health & Safety Committee. The first bill we'll hear this evening is BILL NO. 8251 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHTS OF THE BLIND AND OTHERWISE PHYSICALLY DISABLED. As you testify, I would ask that you give your name and I would like to begin this evening's hearing by asking Rep. Thornton if she would like to speak.

REP. THORNTON: Thank you Madam Chairman. Members of the Committee. Jean Thornton from the 31st District, Glastonbury. I'm here to speak in favor of 8251 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHTS OF THE BLIND AND OTHERWISE PHYSICALLY DISABLED. I have been working with members of the National Federation of the Blind since last August to perfect this bill. It was called to my attention about the indignities that the blind suffer, the abuses that occur, last August by a constituent of mine, Jonathan May, and he introduced me to the President of the National Federation of the Blind, Rev. Howard May and Shirley Lebowitz was the Legislative Chairman. The four of us have been working, as I say, since last August on this bill. I even brought them in to speak with the attorneys here in the Commissioner's office to perfect it. There is a definite need for a bill of this type to establish the rights that we all think we enjoy. This will enable the blind to find suitable housing, employment, access to public places.

When I hear of things such as a blind person being denied access to a restaurant because they might soil the carpet, or something of that sort, this infuriates me. This should not be. When I hear about them being denied access to an apartment because they have a seeing eye dog, and dogs are not allowed, this upsets me also. Either we sighted people are too paternalistic, too protective or we're too callous and this bill is one measure to try and overcome the inequities that I found exist. I'm appalled at what happens in the state sometimes. I'm sure you'll hear more from the other speakers about actually what has happened to them and you'll see the necessity for this bill. I certainly urge you to give favorable consideration to this bill. Thank you.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you, Rep. Thornton. Is there any other Legislator who would like to speak? If not, we will call the first name on the speaker's list, Mrs. Shirley Lebowitz. I'm quite sure the phone on your desk is activated. Perhaps you can just (last part of this not recorded).

MRS. LEBOWITZ: Madam Chairman, Members of this C ommittee. My name is Mrs. Shirley Lebowitz. I am a registered nurse and before I lost my vision, I was employed in the field of nursing education. I have been working with a guide dog for three years and have recently become active in organizations of the blind on the national, state and local levels. I am First Vice President of the Greater Hartford Chapter of the National

MRS. LEBOWITZ (Con't): Federation of the Blind. I am First Vice President and Legislative Chairman of the National Federation of the Blind in Connecticut. Recently I have been elected to the National Executive Committee of the largest nation-wide organization of the blind, the National Federation of the Blind. I am testifying in favor of HB 8251.

Today a blind person can function in a sight-structured world. Modern technology has given us many devices and techniques. Many methods and systems have been devised which minimize the handicapping circumstances of blindness. In spite of all this, many blind persons fail to reach the full potential of their talents and abilities for far too often whatever it is they strive to do, they find themselves stymied by discretion and prejudice. Too often those with whom we must deal in our daily lives because of preconceived notions, equate blindness with helplessness, incompetence and a life of total dependency. We, of the National Federation of the Blind, are working to remove the stumbling block of ignorance and prejudice. We are trying to improve the public attitude toward blindness. HB8251 is an effort to secure for the blind and otherwise physically disabled the same rights and privileges which are so casually accepted and freely exercised by the sighted and able-bodied. It is an expression of our determination to live full and self-dependent lives. Unreasonable denial due to false notions and preconceived notions have kept many blind people from achieving their goals. We do not ask for special privileges.

We ask only to be judged on our merit and abilities, not prejudged because we are blind. With this bill, the blind and otherwise physically disabled would gain equal access to public places, facilities, accommodations, conveyances. It would give the right to equal employment opportunity, the right to housing offered to the public and, Madam Chairman, the right to know that when these rights are denied us, we will be upheld by law.

Madam Chairman, it has been my experience that it is not the physical loss of sight which is the real handicap of blindness, it is rather public attitude, well intentioned or not, which really is holding the blind back. On October 28th, 1972, the National Federation of the Blind passed unanimously a resolution asking us to seek enactment of a bill effecting the rights of the blind. We were encouraged and supported by organizations of and for the blind by people who are in the profession of working with the blind, by parents of blind and physically disabled children, by individuals blind and physically adults. Similar legislation has been passed since 1966 in twenty-four states and the District of Columbia. A favorable report on HB 8251 followed by positive action of the General Assembly will greatly improve the lives of the blind and physically disabled citizens of this state. This concludes my testimony. Thank you very much.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you Mrs. Lebowitz. Is there any member of the Committee who would like to ask Mrs. Lebowitz a question? Thank you very much. Mrs. Dorothy Campbell.

MRS. CAMPBELL: Madam Chairman, my name is Dorothy Campbell.

SEN. BERRY: Would you hold the mike right up to your mouth please. Just hold it

SEN. BERRY (Con't): right up to your mouth.

MRS. CAMPBELL: Is this better?

SEN. BERRY: That's fine, thank you.

MRS. CAMPBELL: I'm Mrs. Dorothy Campbell. I live in Newtown. I'm employed as medical secretary presently at Fairfield Hills Hospital. Formerly I was a graduate of Teachers College, Columbia getting my degree as a part time deal while I was teacher at the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind. After I married and needed work to do, I became a stand operator and operated a store at Fairfield Hills Hospital until it was necessary for me to give it up as the project for the patients there and after that it took me two years before I was able to get, even though I was employed at Fairfield Hills, it took me two years before I could persuade anyone there that I was capable of being one of the medical secretaries, but and now I think I'm pretty much taken for granted in that position.

My dog, I have had a seeing eye dog since 1938 and I am supposed to be here to talk about dogs, the seeing eye dog, and not about myself. It was in 1937 that I went visiting a friend, still in the process of losing my sight, that this friend read to me an article about the seeing eye and about Morris Frank and his work. It was unbelievable to me that these dogs could be what the article said, but I determined that I would inquire further and the very next June I was training with my first dog. I have had four seeing eye dogs, the one who is with me tugging at the leash right now because she's rather inquisitive, is named Olga. I have had two boxers and two shepherds, alternating. I have traveled in New York City and State with my dogs, I have traveled quite widely here in Connecticut, although I don't have quite the opportunity to do so right now because I live on a highway where there is very little bus service and the highway is such a busy one because we need a new 25 there quite badly, it's such a busy highway that I can't get out there with my dog but I do manage to get ample walking with her on Fairfield Hills Hospital grounds.

About the dogs at the seeing eye. To begin with the instructors at the seeing eye, I can say little about other schools. There are several schools in this country. There's Guiding Eyes in Yorktown Heights, the Pilot Dog in Columbus, Ohio, Leader Dogs in Michigan and a school in California. I know that there are others. To this date, the seeing eye has trained and successfully started out in their work over six thousand two hundred dogs. I have had four of those dogs and feel so grateful that I have had their companionship and their fine work. The instructors at the seeing eye serve at least a three year apprenticeship that their study and their work is very strict. They give unstintingly of their time to their learning and their training of the dogs. When they are finally allowed to do any training, it is only about two dogs at a time until they gradually learn so that they can go with those dogs under blindfolds themselves. Most of the seeing eye dogs at the present time are bred at the seeing eye's own farm in Morristown and those dogs are placed with Four H children to be raised until they are ready to start their education at about the age of say, thirteen or fourteen months. They are

MRS. CAMPBELL (Con't): trained for sixteen weeks. The trainer has a string of about twelve dogs. He has no more than six or eight students in his class but he has to have more dogs in order to match the dogs with us. But those puppies as they have been growing up have been socializing.

Many people think of the shepherd as a police dog. I have to correct people over and over again to not call my dog a police dog. The shepherd is a very brilliant dog and can be trained as a police dog, yes, granted. It can be trained also as a nurse for children, as watching the child in the playpen and so on, to see that the child doesn't stray away and get harmed in any way, but it can also be trained by socializing as a puppy and growing in a normal puppy life, that dog can be trained to be an excellent guide dog. He does not need a muzzle to stay in a restaurant with his master. It does not really need a muzzle to be on a bus. It certainly doesn't need a muzzle as our present law reads to go along the streets with his master and that is the way the law reads if you look into the law that is in practice at the present time. I'm not saying that any of us keep the muzzle on our dogs any more than we are absolutely obliged to, but to be refused. Mrs. Lebowitz came to me with her dog when I was taking a course in typing and dictaphone work in New Haven. Mrs. Lebowitz came to visit me there with her dog and we were refused to even put a foot into a restaurant there. We were told that they had no room and it was very obvious that there was room because Mr. Lebowitz was with us and also the Y in New Haven, although I have traveled with my dog. I have traveled by plane, I have traveled, with this dog I have traveled by train bus and so on with my others and we stayed in hotels and yet a Y.W. in this state refused me admission unless I had a sighted guide with me at all times. And I am not only capable of working as a secretary, but I have my own home and brought up my son to the college grade as graduate, as well as I am and I think that's enough to be said.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you Mrs. Campbell. Is there any Committee member who would like to ask a question? Now Mrs. Margaret Rocheleau. I'm not sure I pronounced that correctly.

MRS. ROCHELEAU: My name is Mrs. Margaret Rocheleau. I live in Wethersfield. I'll begin over again. My name is Mrs. Margaret Rocheleau. I live in Wethersfield, Connecticut

SEN. BERRY: (tape is inaudible)

MRS. ROCHELEAU: Thank you. My name is Mrs. Margaret Rocheleau. I'm from Wethersfield. As a mother of a son who is blind, I wish to speak for this bill. I want my son to have the right to travel where he wishes, to shop where he wishes, to enter any public place or restaurant that he wishes without suffering the humiliation of being refused simply because he is blind. When he finishes his education and applies for work, I want him to be accepted or refused on the basis of his ability and qualifications for the work and not on the fact that he is blind. In short I wish him the same rights and privileges as every other citizen. The passage of this bill will greatly relieve the burden of worry and concern that I have for my son's future. I urge you all to support this bill.

SEN BERRY: Thank you. Would you like to leave your statement with us please.  
Thank you. Mr. William Patton.

MR. PATTON: How's that? Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am William Patton, Director of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, the State Board of Education and Services for the Blind, officially representing the Board, in favor of House Bill 8251 which essentially names and includes blind and visually handicapped and otherwise physically disabled persons in existing civil rights legislation.

Blind and handicapped persons as individual members of society should already have the same rights extended to all Americans. However, the reality situation often presents attitudes, policies and practices that are prejudicial and discriminatory.

Much of the problem in relation to blindness is a result of information and misunderstanding by the general public about blindness and blind people and the tendency to categorize blind people into one common group, "The Blind." Quite the contrary, blind individuals are just that, individuals with the same wide range of interests, aptitudes and abilities as the sighted population. Legally blind individuals do have sight loss, even this is very individual, ranging from total loss to varying degrees of residual vision. Blind people are able to learn appropriate techniques and to use helpful aids to accommodate, where this is necessary, to accommodate for the lack of vision and they are quite capable of being productive members of their family, of their community and of society, including responsible employment at all levels.

Prejudice and discrimination are often encountered by blind persons in housing, use of trained guide dogs for travel, free use of public transportation and equal employment opportunities. There is a great lack of understanding of the ability of properly trained blind persons to perform on a competitive basis in almost all areas of employment, unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and professional.

The Agency I administer is responsible for the employment program for blind persons in Connecticut. It is called Vocational Rehabilitation for Blind Persons. Last fiscal year we placed ninety-one persons, blind persons, into employment. This year we should exceed one hundred. A recent survey indicated that blind persons are employed in Connecticut in more than one hundred and twenty-five different types of occupations, including industrial placement at all levels, tax representative, college instructor, public relation specialist, vending stand operator, office clerk, receptionist, medical transcriptionist, piano technician, attorney, social worker, counselor, teacher, etc., etc. Studies have repeatedly shown that a properly trained blind person can perform on an equal competitive basis with his coworker and that the accident and safety record of blind persons in employment is equal to or in many cases better than their sighted coworker.

It is the challenge to the blind community, to organizations of blind people and to agencies serving blind persons to enlighten employers and the general public about blindness and blind people. This is an unavoidably slow process because it involves some attitudes and stereotypes that have

MR. PATTON (Con't): been 2000 years in the making. Legislation is needed to provide a clear understanding of the rights of blind and otherwise physically disabled persons. It is not possible to legislate attitude change. It is quite possible to legislate a clear statutory base for changing discriminatory behavior. Your support of House Bill 8251 will be a positive step in the direction of improving opportunities for blind persons. Thank you.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you, Mr. Patton. Would you like to leave that material with us?

MR. PATTON: I have it ....and I will.

SEN. BERRY: Fine, thank you. Are there any Committee member who would like to raise a question? Thank you very much. Our next speaker will be State Comptroller, Mr. Agostenelli.

MR. AGOSTENELLI: Thank you very much. Madam Chairman, Members of the Committee: I wish to speak in favor of COMMITTEE BILL 8251. I'll be very brief because many of the items have been covered. The Office of the Comptroller has had the opportunity and the occasion to employ many non-sighted individuals and I can say to you that the taxpayers of the State of Connecticut have been well rewarded by this particular hiring practice. I feel that this bill should be passed because these people should be judged on their abilities and qualifications. If I had to rate our non-sighted people that work for the Comptroller's Office, they would have to rate on production, ability and qualifications, in almost all areas much higher than the other individuals we have in our Department. I would urge the Committee to report COMMITTEE BILL 8251 out in favor, very favorable. I highly recommend it. Thank you.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you very much. The next speaker is Mrs. Louise McDevitt.

MRS. McDEVITT: Thank you Madam Chairman. I'm Mrs. Louise McDevitt from Danbury, Connecticut. As the mother of a legally blind child, I wish to urge the legislature to remove all discriminatory roadblocks that now bar the way for the sightless. These youngsters, who daily work so hard to overcome their handicaps, should not have additional, needless legal hurdles placed in their way to a full, responsible citizenship. Do what needs to be done. Remove the barriers, cease the overprotective climate. Support House Bill 8251.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you Mrs. McDevitt. Do you have a written statement you'd like to leave with us? Mr. Frank Meunier.

MR. MEUNIER: I am Frank Meunier, President of the Greater Hartford Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind in Connecticut. I live in Wethersfield but teach in Berlin. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that man is endowed with certain inalienable rights, that among these are the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This often quoted paragraph is from the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America written almost 200 years ago by Thomas Jefferson. HOUSE BILL 8251 is now before the Connecticut Legislature, is in its own way a form of declaration of independence. Though

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MR. MEUNIER (Con't): written differently, it is a declaration of independence of the blind from discrimination of all kinds, employment, housing, public facilities, just about every other category of discrimination that is possible to achieve or imagine. It is not guaranteeing the right to life when people are put into sub-standard housing. The guarantee of liberty is not kept when men are unallowed to be unemployed for over a year and then when they are employed merely to be under-employed. The guarantee of the right of liberty is also not kept when blind people are kept out of theaters, concert halls and other public facilities because of some silliness such as a seeing eye dog. The Declaration of Independence and this currently proposed bill are similar in more ways than one. Similarities are so striking, so complete that it would seem almost impossible not to recognize them. I firmly support H.B. 8251 as a declaration of independence for the blind, for such indeed it is. This bill will go a long way towards guaranteeing justice for the blind. A Greek philosopher once wrote, "Justice is the having and doing of what is ones own." The blind are not seeking rights that other people do not have. The blind are not seeking rights above and in addition to the rights that other people have. The blind are seeking what is their own, what should be their own and if this bill is passed, it will be their own. Thank you very much.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you Mr. Meunier. Mr. Ben Snow.

Mr. Snow: Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee: My name is Ben Snow. I am Second Vice President of the National Federation of the Blind in Connecticut and also the Greater Hartford Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind. For several years, I have worked for and with members of the blind group, of which I am one, although I, as Mr. Patton previously mentioned, have vision enough to travel around without the use of a cane or a dog. I favor H.H.B. 8251 because it is a statement of what blind people can and should be allowed to do. I have, myself, found discrimination in finding employment. I have worked for years under-employed. I now am unemployed and yet I find that I can do all of the things that others do. I have worked in scouting, I have worked for the Heart Fund. It is not just an ability to do these things, but it is the right to do these things that we seek, we who have a visual loss. It is for this reason that I support H.B. 8251. Give us the right to do what we need to do.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you, Mr. Snow. Mr. Jonathan May.

Mr. May: Madam Chairman, Members of the Committee: My name is Jonathan May. I have been blind for about four years and am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut. I urge your support of House Bill 8251. The bill is a statement as most of us have already said of the rights that you all take for granted, but are denied, out of ignorance, to many members of the community who are blind or who have some physical impairment. Others have spoken about some of the problems that you encounter when you're blind. They are not total throughout the state but there is many instances when a person can go to a restaurant and they, you're denied admission, not blatantly, but because people have fear of blindness. They fear losing their sight and they often transfer this fear to the person who has lost his sight. I think for the young blind person the field of employment is one of the most important things. The misconception about the blind are just all pervasive, that the denial of employment is allpervasive to most of the young blind community

MR. MAY (Con't): in this state. I was working and when I lost my sight, I was working in a personnel administrative capacity. The loss of sight resulted in my demotion to finally stuffing envelopes and to termination of employment, this despite the fact that I was doing about twice as much as the other person in the operation.

Therefore, some of the statements that seem self-evident to you in say Section 14, about having equal people compensation and the same privileges as other people. It's not just being employed, but being under-employed is the problem also. We want to be, if we are properly trained and we do have the ability to do the work, to function in the same capacity as our sighted peers. I believe that H. B. 8251, while though we cannot legislate attitudes, will at least give us a legal protection that we so deserve. There is at present very little that a blind person can do in recourse when he is discriminated against. Again discrimination is not, it's done out of ignorance, not out of malice. Most of the blind know this but it can be an awfully disheartening thing to be continuously denied employment. The Section on employment agencies in Section 14 is pertinent. I have gone to several employment agencies and they say well, we can't do anything with you, Mr. May, go to the state. The state says we're not hiring, try something else. Others will tell you, well, Mr. May, you're very well qualified but, but er, ah, your condition makes it so that you would have to accept something less and I asked why this is and they said that there's nothing you can do about it, private employment just doesn't want the blind and this is just unjust, unfair, unreasonable. Blind people, if given the proper techniques, daily living, training and mobility, communications skills, can learn to function along with their sighted counterparts. Section 11 of this bill addresses itself to that function.

There are many facilities in this state, educational facilities to which a blind person is denied admission, again because of the myth, superstition that pervades the blind community and the sighted community about blindness. While this will not be a panacea to blindness, it certainly will be a groundwork, foundation. While a blind person may not utilize all the rights that he takes, that he would like, at least he can hold his head a little bit higher under law in this state with the passage of 8251. Lastly, I would like to mention to you all that you as members of the committee, your colleagues in the House and your spouse or member of your family could become blind tomorrow. Blindness knows no discrimination. You could lose your sight by accident or disease, a member of your family could give birth to a congenitally blind child and I would ask you really if you thought with this if any of the attended medical problems were taken care of and you went to sought, if you sought out the skills and the techniques of common sense, how to deal with your blindness, would you really believe, as sighted society does, that you have a different type of protoplasm, and that you are inferior, and that you have to sit back and work in a sheltered shop or accept a condition of second rate status in the state.

I really believe you would, and I think if you did, seek out and try to do your share on the basis of merit, not of privilege, I think it would become startlingly clear what we're talking about and it would become very evident why every portion of House Bill 8251 should be passed by your Committee and your colleagues in the General Legislature and the provisions of this

MR. MAY (Con't): bill should be vigorously enforced. Thank you very much.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you, Mr. May. Mr. Charles Cote.

MR. COTE: I don't have too much to say but a couple of times I've been trying to get a place to live, like in the Y and stuff like that. I had a little hard time like you had to have a statement like from my rehabilitation counsellor saying you know, that I guess I wasn't too much of a risk or anything like that. You know, like when I went to New Haven for a while to live I kind of almost had my doubts where I was going to stay there. And a little bit about this job, you know trying to find jobs, a couple places I've been in to while I was trying to better myself and everything, I didn't even get a chance to fill out an application and that's why I'm in favor of this bill H.B. 8251.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you Mr. Cote. Mr. David Bates.

MR. BATES: Madam Chairman, Legislative Committee: My name is David Bates. I'd like to cite an example of discrimination in employment. I wish first to say that I fall into the category of what is considered useful vision. I have enough vision to read and write print and enough vision to travel to and from without the use of a cane or seeing eye dog. Upon my completion of my education, I decided I would like to seek employment in the banking industry. I thus applied at one of the major banking industries in the State of Connecticut. Now, as far as the personnel interviewer was concerned, I had enough vision to perform the job without any risk to the company or to other personnel or to myself. However, this employment interviewer was apparently new to his profession. The next day I went for my physical examination, which I passed, except for the vision requirement. I did not meet the vision standard set forth by this company. So, thus I was denied the right to be employed.

I then, by coincidence, happened to meet this personnel interviewer on the street several months later and he wanted to know how I was making out and whether I did find employment, which I did and he was very sorry that he could not employ me in that particular profession. However, as far as he was concerned that I met all the requirements, however I did not meet the requirement of the vision standard set forth by this corporation. So thus, if he would have pursued trying to fill the vacancy, there was a chance that he would be in a lot of trouble so thus, he had to let me go. Thank you.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you, Mr. Bates. Mr. Milan Knight.

MR. KNIGHT: .....speak in favor of House Bill 8251 wearing two hats. One I come as the father of three legally blind children, two of whom are of working age. It is my hope that as you understand this bill and deliberate it, you will see the reasons and the rational for this bill that have been delineated here this evening. It is also my pleasure to be the Governor of 23B Lions International, which encompasses Hartford and Litchfield County of this section of Connecticut and as its official spokesman, we the two thousand one hundred and sixty-one Lions here in this area also urge that you give careful consideration and hopefully can support this bill. I cannot speak

MR. KNIGHT (Con't): for the other four thousand Lions, making up the other sections of Connecticut but they are aware of the work that we have been doing here in our district in the last two years with our employ the handicapped group. Our cabinet has been working diligently with the state and with employers throughout the state to employ the legally handicapped who have the qualifications to hold a job. Our Chairman is here and he will speak later tonight on the same issue. We hope that you'll give serious consideration and that at the end of your deliberations, Madam Chairman and Committee, that you will report this out and watch it pass.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you, Mr. Knight. Mr. Paul Earley.

MR. EARLEY: Madam Chairman, Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen: I am here to speak in favor of House Bill 8251. I speak to you with two frames of reference, one as a legally blind person and two as a rehabilitation counsellor with the Board of Education and Services for the Blind. As I progressed through life, I have personally on a number of occasions experienced direct discrimination, not only by institutions of higher learning, school systems but by employers as well. As a rehabilitation counsellor with the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, part of my duties have been to place blind and legally blind persons in employment. I've had frequent opportunities to deal with employers, to attempt to educate them as to the capacities of the blind persons. More often than not I have called upon employers and asked them the question, given that I can come up with a qualified and adequately trained blind person, would they be willing to consider them for employment? The response is almost 19 to 1 No. It is always based on the fact that the person is blind and for no other reason. Of the 1 in 19 who is willing to consider a blind person for employment, it involves a rather lengthy process of education, of demonstrating to the employer that a blind person can function safely, that he can produce and that he can remain competitive with his sighted peers.

The situation not only exists within industry, but it exists on professional levels as well. As a result of this, I would request your capable reporting on the bill at hand, House Bill 8251. Thank you.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you, Mr. Earley. Do you have a written statement you would like to leave with the Committee.

MR. EARLEY: No Mam.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you. Mr. Al Petroski.

MR. PETROSKI: Madam Chairman, Members of the Legislative Committee: I am Al Petroski, President of the Blind Association for Progressive Action and I'm here to speak in favor of House Bill 8251. There are two main stereotypes of blind people accross the state, one as blind beggar or two, as blind supermen a la Mike Longstreet. I'm not a blind beggar and I'm sure as hell

MR. PETROSKI (Con't): not Mike Longstreet, but I am an average blind person in support of House Bill 8251. In my experience as a blind person, I have had some discrimination and would like to give you a brief summary of this. I attended the University of Hartford for a year and lived in an off campus dormitory at that time. I was told that due to insurance risks, I must live in a first floor apartment, rather than a second floor because I might fall, upstairs I guess. After attending the University of Hartford for a while I worked in an aircraft plant in Darien, who had enough foresight to hire blind people. Due to recession, our particular department had a mass layoff and, of course, I also was laid off. I have the full qualifications to apply for another job in a defense plant in the Norwich-New London area. I believe there is only one but in this defense plant, and had recommendations of the vice president of this corporation from the Hartford area for the job. I was told that I was not qualified for the job and I might be an insurance risk.

After looking for a job for six months to a year, I decided to further my education and am now a student at Eastern Connecticut State College. But by furthering my education, does this improve my job opportunities? I wonder There are also college graduates who are blind looking for a job on the market today and I just wonder how much this education will enhance job opportunities. This is why I, as President of the Blind Association for Progressive Action am endorsing House Bill 8251. Thank you Madam Chairman.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you Mr. Petroski. Mr. George Precourt.

MR. PRECOURT: Madam Chairman, Members of the Committee: My name is George Precourt and I reside in East Hartford and I speak serving three hats. First, as the Chairman of the Employment of the Blind Committee for the Lions District 23B described in Hartford and Litchfield Counties. This Committee's sole purpose in life is to try to obtain gainful employment for those people who are blind. For the past two years, we have been publically speaking on behalf of the people who are blind in the State of Connecticut and can attest to the flagrant outright violations of just human discrimination if nothing else. We have had men who are blind holding doctorates pushing a pencil and were laid off because the job was discontinued and told that there just was nothing else for them. We have had teachers holding certificates in special education who taught for 21 months for free, donating their time, that when a job became vacant, were denied applications for employment for that specific job without explanation. For this reason, as the Chairman of the Committee on Employment for the Blind, I fully endorse House Bill 8251.

I'm really sorry that it's necessary that we have to go to legislation to become human beings in a country, in a state and in a community that really has a great big heart. I'm sorry that it is necessary that I must talk to a Committee who must decide on legislation so that a blind person who makes an application to one of the larger employers in this state would not be denied employment because the men's room was on the second floor and he wouldn't find it. And for those of you who perhaps would consider this just absurd, that anyone would use this kind of argument against a blind person, we have

MR. PRECOURT (Con't): in our files, covering only 21 months, flagrant violations of this nature. We deal with them every day. We have calls pleading for help for people who have better education than I but because they are blind find it impossible to do anything but to collect welfare. Yet here in this House, in this building everyday, we make every possible effort to remove those possibilities of collecting the free gifts that the blind so rarely want to collect and yet receive so quickly because it seems to be the least thing that we can do for them.

I would hope that when the Committee considers and deliberates on this bill, they would understand that there are many people like myself who go around the state advertising and soliciting employment and regular kinds of employment for those physically handicapped people who are not equally treated when they make application for employment in this state. I hope that when we make this consideration, we will remember that I can personally attest to being called at eleven o'clock at night by a blind person who had tried to register in a motel in a community not too far from this Capitol and had been denied that right because it was a problem with the dog. It seems incredible that when everyday we go to a public meeting place and pledge allegiance to our flag and talk about the Declaration of Independence and applaud the things that are necessary to help the blind obtain the things that they need as blind and then overlook the fact that we always consider them blind people and not people who are just simply blind. And I think that's a very necessary consideration for this Committee to make. It's unfortunate indeed that we must put teeth behind the appeals of the state services for the blind and committees for myself be appointed for the blind by the Lions.

It never ceases to amaze me that I'm receiving invitations throughout the State of Connecticut and into other states just simply because I'm telling the "tell it how it is" story about the many discriminations against these people. It's just things like a telephone operator's job, someone to answer telephones, jobs being advertised publically. A blind person makes application, sighted people make application, the job normally will pay \$2.50. The job becomes available for a person who is blind, it suddenly becomes minimum wage with clarifications of so many days of free labor because we don't really know whether they're going to be able to handle the job. And, I could go on for hours after only 21 months of an effort. I stand before you as an employer who can attest personally from his experiences of having personally discriminated against the blind, as an employer refusing to employ them because of fear of the unknown, and yet now, employ them regularly and at present employ three full time employees who are working on machines side by side with sighted people without discrimination and with totally equal opportunity in our factory. I'm proud to say that in the course of the six and one-half years that I have been the factory manager in this particular plant, no accident has ever been reported and no lost time with any blind person who has ever been employed in my firm. On the other hand I wouldn't want the Committee to consider that persons who are blind are superhuman per the Longstreet that we spoke of earlier. I have fired blind and I hope that I've rehired blind.

I hope that when we consider this in our Committee, that we strongly consider that we're talking about just simply something that should already be there and when it goes, comes out, I hope that it comes out on a favorable report

MR. PRECOURT (Con't) that we receive a totally unanimous support from the House and the Senate so that we can then advertise to the citizens of this state that there is truly discrimination and we need to stop it now. Thank you.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Precourt. The Rev. Howard May.

REV. MAY: I'm Rev. Howard May, Willington, Connecticut. I am an active pastor of a church and I'm also President of the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut. I have been blind for a little over eleven years so that that means for about forty years or a little better, I saw probably as well as most of you. I knew what it was to be a sighted person. I was already serving the church when I lost my sight. It was good to me. It voted, it gave me a vote of confidence, the continuation, so I am still working for that church. This undergirded my own emotional adjustment to blindness and helped me a great deal. But you see, I still thought as a sighted person and for nine years, I didn't want to have anything to do with those blind people. I just wasn't so sure what kind of weird ducks they were and I wanted to stay away. But in May of 1971 something called me to attend the seminar at Oak Hill School and there were maybe as many as two hundred there and I heard with my own ears the cries of desperation and of anger and of frustration, a crying out by the blind for help, for opening the doors, that something had to be done to help people who are blind. And I suddenly realized that though at the moment I was secure in my own little employment situation, that there may come a day when I too would be crying out in desperation because of the circumstances and situations in a sighted world, of which that sighted world was unaware.

And I decided that I had to get off my easy chair and become a part of the National Federation of the Blind working not just for myself but for all the blind in the state and the nation. That's why I'm here. I would warn the Committee you have heard from a number of young, able people here. Incidentally Jon May and I are not related, we only met through the National Federation of the Blind. We discovered that our birthdates fall on the same day of the month but there is a slight differential in the year of birth, however. I want to point out that you've heard from a number of these very young, able people, college people with good training who are not finding the kind of employment for which they are trained, the frustration levels are great and somehow we must break through and open the doors of opportunity lest we waste the lives of not only these but of others who will be coming along and are coming along now.

The future of these young people is involved perhaps in this legislation. This will not solve our problems but as the speaker ahead of me pointed out, and so ably and with so much experience, that we somehow have to help the whole of the commercial and industrial world of Connecticut to realize that here is potential talent going to waste, being thrust perhaps on the welfare roll, which is good neither for the individual nor for the economy and society of which we are a part. I want to thank all of those who have spoken here ahead of me and those who may follow, Madam Chairman, representing not just the National Federation of the Blind, but other blind persons and organizations, the Lions Club who are working for us and with us. We appreciate

REV. MAY (Con't): everything that they do with us and for us and we hope that as you help us not only to pass this bill but become aware of the problems that confront both blind and disabled in our state, that you too may join with all of us in making this a better state and a better place in which to live for the blind, physically disabled and also the sighted because we are a part of this society. May I thank you much for listening to me. I have here a statement, not of my own, but one who would have liked also to have been here and thought that maybe San Francisco and visiting her daughter out there would be a little more fun than coming to this hearing. I don't mean to insult you, you understand. Thank you anyhow.

SEN. PERRY: Thank you Rev. May. We'll take that statement and make sure the Committee has access to it. Is there anyone else who would like to speak on this bill. You can speak right up there if someone would hand him a microphone please.

MR. COHAN: Madam Chairperson and Members of the Committee: My name is Bill Cohan and I am from Bristol. I'd like to speak in favor of House Bill 8251. Discrimination against the blind and physically handicapped is something that has been happening for generations and a bill to eliminate this has long been overdue. I personally as someone who is employable and who is educable would want a college or an employer to base his decisions on my capabilities, on according to whether I was able or not to do what was expected of me and not simply on my handicap. I remember when I first applied to the University of Hartford, well it was before I had applied, I had called the University and the first thing I was told was that I would not be accepted as a student because, "we did not have the facilities with which to teach you." And I'd like to remind people that the facilities and special aids a blind or handicapped person needs to perform his activities either as a student or as an employed person, these aids and assistances that he needs to work, are his responsibility and the only thing that an employer should be concerned with is the ability of the person to do what is expected of him and he should be hired and fired according to whether he is able or not to do what is expected of him.

Another thing which happens in our society is the fantastic stereotyping of blind and handicapped peoples. Employers will often lump an entire blind community into one area. They will say that from their experience with one particular blind person that they know can do such and such a thing, so they automatically assume all can or cannot do that certain thing. And I'd like to emphasize the point that blind persons are, first of all, individuals and they have the same human traits and emotions that any sighted people have and that they are, first of all, individuals who are blind and not blind individuals. Thank you.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you very much. Is there anyone else who would like to speak on this bill? Take the mike off the desk behind you.

MS. COUTASH: My name is Jeanette Coutash. I'm a student at the University of Connecticut. First of all I would like to say that I had no idea that this bill was going to be discussed until today and with me are three other representatives from the University. One individual is blind and the other

MS. COUTASH (Con't): two, well one other individual is blind and has other disabilities, we also have a public health coordinator with us. We are all representing university. We are all in favor of House Bill 8251 and recommend it be seriously considered and recommend that you seriously consider every possibility and pass this bill. I'd like to say one thing which is in regard to my own situation. When I first applied to colleges, I was told that I could not be accepted at Western Connecticut State College unless I were to merely take a degree in liberal arts, which meant that most fields of education which were open to sighted people were denied me. No sighted person has the right to judge what I can do and what I can't do unless there are certain physical barriers which cannot be overcome. If it's at all possible, I would like to be able to have some say in the final decision that is going to be made about my life and what I can do about it.

Perhaps I can help other people to make the right decision about my life, but the only way I can do this is if in some way I am given the opportunity and if people are allowed to consider me for what I am. I'm graduating this year. I am a senior at present and when I go for employment I would like to be able to be told that whatever job I get, was got on merit not for pity, not because it was the only thing my employer could do, but because I really deserved it and I think that almost, that everyone here feels the same way. I strongly recommend passage of House Bill 8251.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you very much. Is there anyone else who would like to be heard on this bill? Would you pick up the mike.

MS. GREGAREK: My name is Janet Gregarek and I work for the West Haven V.A. Hospital as a medical transcriber. Prior to that I was in New York, V.A. Outpatient Clinic as a medical transcriber. I'm in favor of House Bill 8251 because I have experienced some degree of humiliation because of not being able to get into a living situation in New York. Without the intervention of a social worker on my behalf to make it seem as if it were an urgent situation that I get into this hotel for working girls. Prior to that they would not admit me because of their anxiety about my having an accident, falling down the stairs mainly. It's frustrating to us to have to be forced to have someone intervene for us all the time, especially after being considered independent. You don't feel very independent when you have to tolerate that. So please consider House Bill 8251. Thank you.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you very much. Is there anyone else who would like to be heard on this bill? Would you give him the mike please.

MR. DRESSER: My name is Steve Dresser. I work as a drug counsellor in Meriden, Connecticut at Dartek House. I guess in many ways I could point to all the discrimination that there has been in certain times, attitudes I've felt from different people, but I don't really want to go into that because I think that there has certainly been enough testimony tonight of people that there really is not much more to say about it. We've all had our stories of discrimination. We've all had our problems. We've all felt the attitudes that people have conveyed to us about employing the blind, about accepting the blind for what they are. I think what's important to me, to me it's

MR. DRESSER (Con't): important that this bill is being considered now and will hopefully be passed because I think that to some degree we have to state that blind people need the civil rights that others can get without any questions being asked, without any reasons being given. What I also want to say though, is that if we're going to have a legislature that's willing to consider a bill like this, willing to take up time, willing to spend time listening to us, to our arguments to our pleas, I want them to know that personally, as a blind person, I intend to do my part to make sure that people don't have the chance to discriminate against me because of anything I've done and I think that this is as important as talking about the bill that we have.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you very much. Is there anyone else now? Yes.

MRS. MORGENSON: My name is Mrs. Wayne Morgenson and my husband is legally blind in the State of Connecticut and a year ago this month my husband was laid off from work after working two and one half years on a machine. He was hired as a handicapped person, it wasn't anything they didn't know about and after two and one-half years they laid him off saying that it was a hazard to his health. I am in support of this bill and hope some day that my husband can get a job and we can fulfill all our dreams.

SEN. BERRY: Thank you. Is there anyone else now who would like to be heard? If there is no one else, we shall take a five minute recess before we hear any further bills. Thank you all for coming.

REP. CONNOLLY: (Rep. Connolly is now presiding) I would like to set down some ground rules before we start please. I have asked you as you came in to sign on the speaker's list and I will call out the name of four speakers. I will take two from this side and two from this side alternately and I think that would expedite matters for everyone. We will be here some time. Also I will ask the Committee for any questions. If you have a written statement I would appreciate it if you would leave it for the perusal of the Committee. I will follow our usual custom of asking legislators to speak first. I wonder if there are any legislators present who would like to speak. Dr. Cohen, would you go ahead please.

REP. DR. COHEN: Senator Berry, Representative Connolly, Members of the Committee: I'm very happy to speak on HOUSE BILL 5060 for a very good reason. I introduced a bill similar to this two years ago and again last year and Sen. Berry and Sen. Connolly both being nurses added something to the bill and made the good bill a better bill, and with your permission because I'm in a delicate condition, I'd like to sit if I may.

REP. CONNOLLY: Go right ahead.

REP. DR. COHEN: In speaking on this bill, I shall first discuss the need in the State of Connecticut for arresting the sharply rising costs of hospital and health care. Second, how this can be accomplished without affecting quality and third, how the Commission is going to be made up and what its functions are. I've been asked to be brief because it's late, I'm going to be brief.