



Breaking // Police investigation underway following officer-involved shooting in Hartford's north end

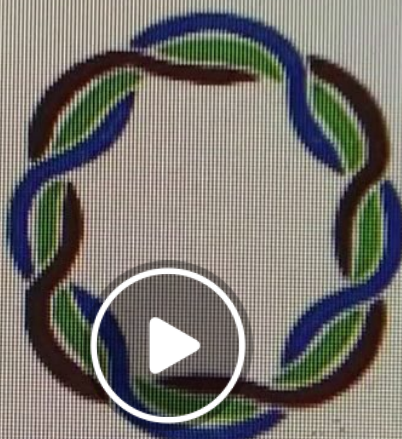
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Formal discrimination complaint filed on behalf of people with disabilities

COURTNEY ZIELLER

POSTED MAY 5, 2020 1



**DISABILITY RIGHTS
CONNECTICUT**
Justice. Community. Inclusion.

TEAM COVERAGE



HARTFORD, CT (WFSB) -- Local organizations that help people with disabilities have filed a formal discrimination complaint with the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in Washington D.C.

They say the recent "Compassionate Visitors Policy" issued by state agencies in Connecticut isn't helping the most vulnerable population.

A number of organizations that help people with disabilities have worked on this for more than a month, urging the state's Department of Public Health to come up with a policy.

[RELATED: Organizations continue to push for changes to be made to Compassionate Visitors Policy](#)

Last week they did, but it was only recommendations, and after numerous people with disabilities have been hospitalized, it turned into a family's worst nightmare.

The 12-page complaint filed by Disability Rights Connecticut and other advocacy organizations calls on the federal government to investigate Connecticut's Department of Public Health.

Last week, Connecticut came up with a policy that "will strongly recommend and work with hospitals to allow one support person to accompany an individual served by DDS (Department of Developmental Services)."

However, organizations say it's not good enough, because every hospital has their own policies and can refuse visitors.

"I still don't understand why the state hasn't taken action," said Bob Joondeph, of Disability Rights CT.

They've asked for revisions to the policy, but state agencies haven't responded.

"If you don't have a disability, you don't understand what it might be like to be totally isolated to not be able to see or hear, to not be able to understand what is happening around you," he said.

The complaint shares the stories of three patients who went to different hospitals for help.

Organizations say not allowing a patient support person to be present during hospitalization jeopardizes their quality of care.

One story is that of Shane Sessa, who has cerebral palsy and limited communication.

He was admitted for stomach pain but was monitored for COVID-19. His test turned out negative.

In the complaint it says, "Shane is still upset and shaken from the experience." It goes on to say Shane sometimes "makes the sound of an ambulance siren to communicate his concern of being taken to the hospital and to receive assurances that he is not going back."

Another patient named GS has been in the hospital for almost three weeks. She tested positive for COVID-19, but was admitted for a kidney infection.

She's now in intensive care. Her family has been trying to visit so they can communicate with hospital staff. Disability Rights CT asked three times for that to happen, but "The hospital refused to grant the accommodation stating that the ICU is a different level of care," the complaint said.

The complaint is now in the hands of the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in Washington D.C.

The office gives Connecticut funds to pay for healthcare for those with disabilities.

"It's a significant amount of resources and it affects the most vulnerable and they have a true stake in making sure their money isn't being used in a way that discriminates those with disabilities," Joondeph said.

Seventeen Connecticut state senators are also backing the organizations.

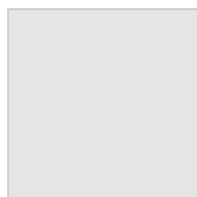
Policies are already in place in New York, New Jersey, Oregon, Illinois and California.

Channel 3 reached out to the Dept. of Public Health and DDS, and both say since it is a pending legal matter, they can't comment.



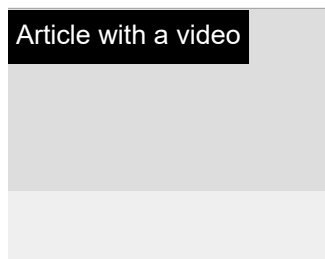
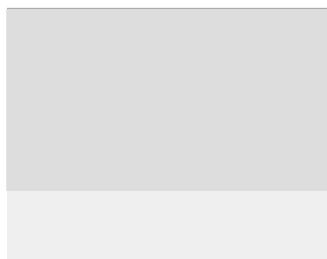
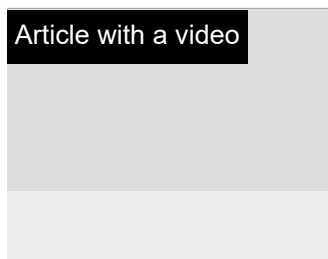
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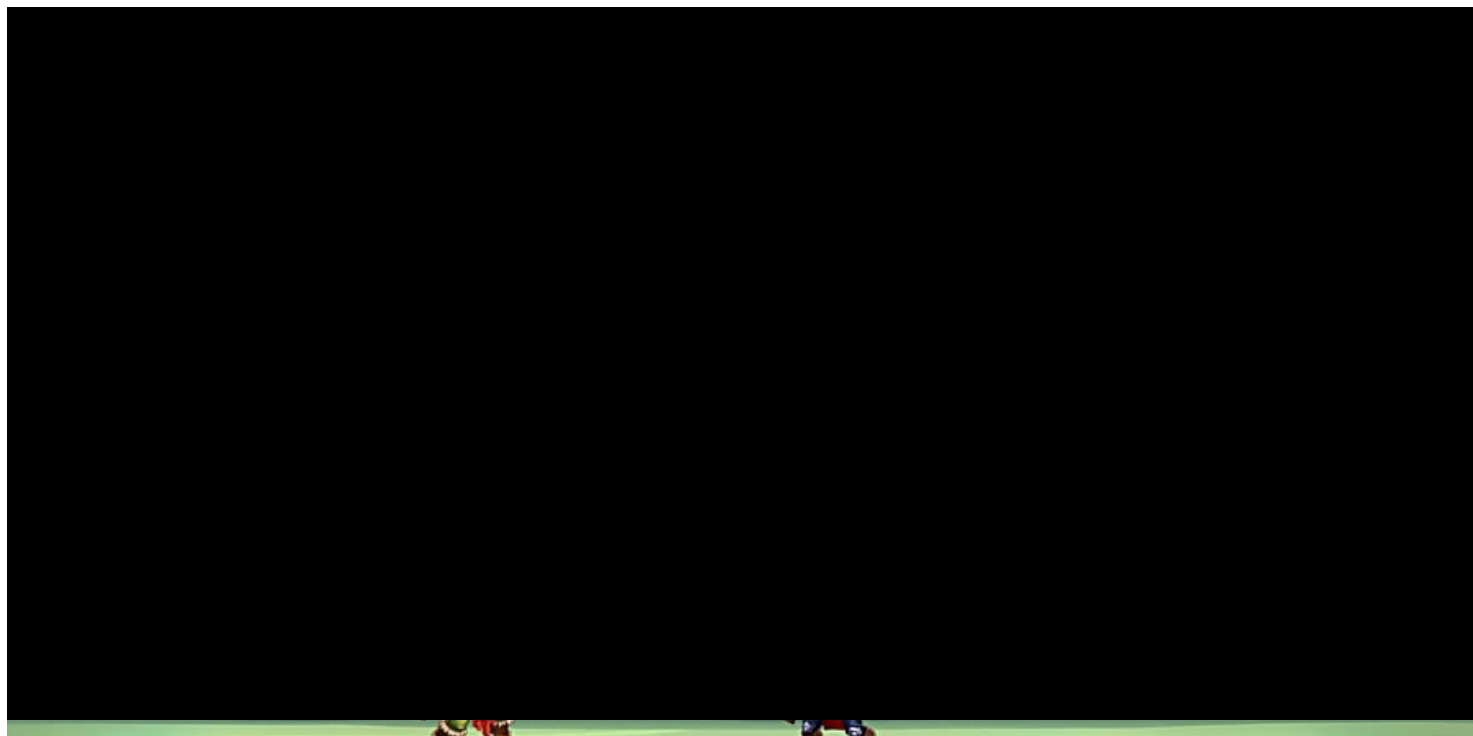
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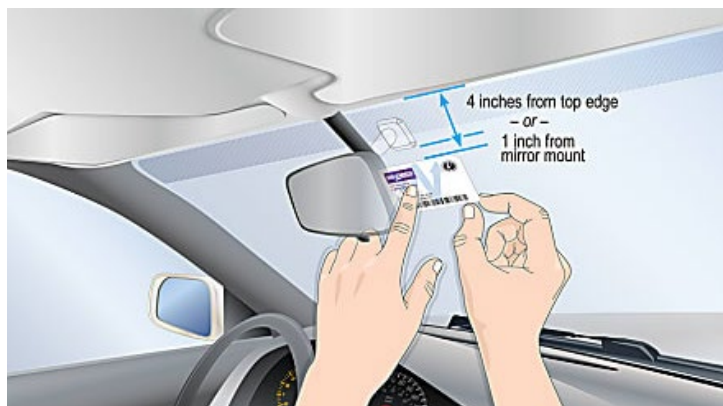
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(1) comment



SL May 6, 2020 12:53pm

Thank you for bringing this to light. However, a large population of adults with Developmental Disorders especially Autism are not serviced by the state. So these regulations by design leave out thier guardians/conservators too. The elderly are also in a similiar position. The courts have given designation to these individuals to have a chosen person present for obvious reasons. If you have a Disability and have a designated person to help you, as an American you should he able to exercise that right.

Welcome to the discussion.

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Contact Info

wfsb.com
3 Denise D'Ascenzo Way
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
Phone: (860) 728-3333
Email: iwitness@wfsb.com

Public File

For questions about WFSB's FCC online public file or help with the FCC online public file, contact: WFSB Human Resources

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