

To: The Judiciary Committee

From: Judge Jack Keyes, New Haven Probate Judge

Re: RB 5598 An Act Concerning the Administration of the Courts of Probate

Date: March 17, 2006

Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of RB 5598.

Specifically, I would like to address the section that proposes that all court personnel be hired through the Office of Probate Court Administrator.

Many of the clerks have said that they are being ignored as the process for change in the system moves forward. The parties are working to protect the judges and the courts, but the employees of the courts are rarely mentioned. We rely on our clerks to perform the nuts and bolts work in our courts. They are the first ones people in need talk to. They take the time to sit with those we serve and assist in filling out forms and explaining what they can expect in our courts. They are a valuable component of the system and the least they deserve is to be protected.

Therefore, I support having all personnel become state employees with all the same benefits and protections. Probate Administration would be responsible for standardizing job classifications, staffing requirements, recruitment, training, payments of salaries and benefits and ensuring that employees have a fair work environment.

Currently, each individual court has sole authority regarding their staffing policy and procedures, the job classifications, experience and training requirements. Salaries of court employees vary significantly. While some judges pay their clerks nearly \$30/hour, other clerks are getting as little as \$8/hour. By placing this responsibility within Probate Administration, all positions would be given designations with specific salary ranges. This would obviously ensure that clerks are being treated fairly through out the state.

It is also important that staffing requirements exist. Currently you have courts that are overstaffed and others that have no staff whatsoever. Probate Administration should have the ability to transfer staff within geographic areas so that courts are open and available to the public. This will lead to greater efficiencies and provide better service to the citizens of the state.

Thank you for your consideration.