

March 26, 2009
Before the Judiciary Committee
Testimony in support of
SB 1157 – Legal Services Funding

My name is Maria Huertas and I am currently employed with Connecticut Legal Services in the New Britain Office as a legal assistant.

I've been working a part of the legal services network since 1975 working in different capacities and in different programs. I can't imagine working any where else; my heart is with the clients that we serve.

Local legal aid programs make a real difference in the lives of low-income American families by helping them resolve everyday legal matters, including family law, housing, education, and consumer issues, and by helping them obtain wrongly denied benefits such as social security and veterans' pensions.

People who are unable to resolve basic legal problems are more likely to experience greater hardships and require assistance from public social services programs

As you already know, today, consumer fraud matters and the mortgage foreclosure crisis are at the forefront. In addition to affecting low-income homeowners, the foreclosures are also forcing low-income renters from their homes.

Legal aid programs are the nation's primary source of legal assistance for women who are victims of domestic violence and identify domestic violence as one of the top priorities in their caseloads.

Various legal needs studies show that, on average, poor households will experience at least one, and perhaps as many as three, serious legal problems each year. Every day, new situations arise that continue to stretch the ability of our country to ensure that low income persons can fairly resolve their legal problems through the justice system.

Our primary funding source has collapsed and we need your help. Unless we can make up the loss in funding, there will be huge staff cuts among the legal services programs and we will be forced to deny services to thousands of low income people in Connecticut.

On behalf of low-income individuals and families who need but cannot afford legal assistance and myself, I thank you for your consideration of this request.