

Testimony of Peter Goselin in Support of SB1157

My name is Peter Goselin. I am a partner in the law firm of Livingston, Adler, Pulda, Meiklejohn & Kelly here in Hartford, and the Connecticut coordinator for the National Lawyers Guild, an organization of lawyers, law students, legal workers and jailhouse lawyers dedicated to human rights. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today in support of SB1157, the bill to create additional funding sources for Connecticut's legal services organizations.

For the last two years, on the second and fourth Wednesday evenings of the month, the Stamford office of Connecticut Legal Services has opened its doors for the Day Laborer Wage Collection Clinic. On every one of those evenings their waiting area quickly fills to capacity with people looking for help. They are restaurant workers, janitors, landscapers, roofers, domestic workers and more. They come, week after week, because their employers have cheated them out of wages and the Stamford clinic is one of the only places these hard working people can go for help.

I have been privileged to be a volunteer attorney at the Wage Collection Clinic from its beginning. Its clients are a face of Connecticut that would shock many members of this committee. Imagine working six days a week, ten hours a day, under grueling conditions. At the end of two months your boss pays you half of what you are owed. When you complain he threatens to call the police and have you run off his property. Imagine being a domestic worker, working 70 or 80 or even 90 hours a week and being paid what amounts to \$2.00 an hour. Imagine being a restaurant worker in the kitchen of a restaurant - the kind of place that gets glowing write-ups in the New York Times - but in the steam and sweat and grease of the kitchen you work fourteen hours a day for \$50 a day.

These are the people that the Clinic helps. Staff and volunteers make phone calls and write demand letters to employers, and when that doesn't work they help these workers to bring legal claims to enforce Connecticut's minimum wage, overtime and wage payment laws. This is where the investment that Connecticut makes in legal services is transformed into tens of thousands of dollars recovered for the working poor in Stamford.

This is why adequate funding for legal services is so vital. Because you, Connecticut's legislators, have passed many good and humanitarian laws. But laws are not self-enforcing and statute books are lifeless ink on pages. Somebody has to do what you intended when you passed these laws: take these words and shape them into tools for the benefit of Connecticut's people, so that words like "each employer . . . shall pay weekly all moneys due each employee on a regular pay day" are not just a nice idea or an opinion about what is fair, but a means to secure an honest day's wage for an honest day's work.

In this economic crisis more than at any other time in the last seventy years, Connecticut's most vulnerable and most exploited need help. One important way of doing that is making sure that there is someone on their side, enforcing the laws that you have passed. Respectfully, I ask that you support SB1157 to ensure that Connecticut's network of legal services organizations is there to do that job.

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