

National Organization of Legal Services Workers International Union, UAW Local 2320, AFL-CIO

113 University Place, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10003 -- (800) UAW-2320 -- (212) 228-0992

Testimony notes of Susan DeMaria, Regional Organizer, NOLSW, UAW Local 2320

I am a Regional Organizer of the National Organization of Legal Service Workers, UAW Local 2320. I represent fourteen legal service organizations in New England. In Connecticut, I represent the employees at Connecticut Legal Services, the paralegals in New Haven Legal Assistance Program and the employees at Connecticut Statewide Legal Services.

Since November 2008, there have been budget deficit reduction negotiations at Connecticut Legal Services and New Haven Legal Assistance. These Legal Services do not receive federal funds, as does Connecticut Statewide Legal Services. As you have heard, the IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts) were depleted due to the reduced interest rates and the lack of private attorneys need for use of the trust accounts. The IOLTA funds for CT Legal Services and New Haven were approximately half of what they had been. This affected many of Connecticut's citizens including the employees of Legal Services.

Legal Service employees are selfless, committed public servants. They are underpaid and overworked. But, these are committed legal people. They are committed to providing to the most needy of our citizens with getting their basic human needs met. The legal service lawyers, paralegals and assistants help prevent homelessness, starvation and domestic violence.

Legal Service attorneys and legal assistants are at the maximum amount of work for which they can handle. They work endless hours. Their workload has increased. During bad economic times for an individual or family, legal services is often the last resort between food and no food, housing and homelessness. And, just at a time when legal services is needed more than ever, their funding is substantially decreased.

What do many of these selfless, committed people do? They took a pay cuts in the form of hours reduced, reduced pensions, increased contributions to health coverage, lesser health insurance coverage and/or a lesser health plan.

At Connecticut Legal Services, the entire workforce agreed to a 20% cut in hours of work; in effect a pay cut. They did this, so that their colleagues would not get laid off. How many actually have reduced their workload is unclear. These legal service employees agreed to have their salaries frozen. Their health plan was changed to a lesser plan.

At the New Haven Legal Assistance Program after a 50% loss in IOLTA funding, at least 3 paralegals were laid off and open job position were not filled. The remainder paralegals and support staff agreed to put a hold on their employer's pension contributions. I was told they could not come today because they had too much work to do. I was told they are overwhelmed and

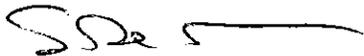
depressed that they can not accommodate their clients' needs. One paralegal said she is now doing what was the work of four people.

As lawyers and paralegals, they could get much better paying jobs, and probably less stressful jobs, in the public and private sector. The attorney salaries range from \$40,000 to \$99,000. Ninety-nine thousand is received only after working in legal services for 21 years! Imagine being a young lawyer, paying off school loans, raising a family and earning \$40,000 a year. A paralegal's salary can start as low as \$24,000.

If there is no increase in funding for these organizations, they will be faced with more cuts this upcoming fiscal year. When the economic times are grim, these legal service workers are the people most needed for those who are hurt by the economy. Without them, the poor is left unprotected and vulnerable. These public servants are much needed at this time. Please increase their funding.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SDe' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Susan DeMaria