

**Written Testimony of Sheila Harris, African-Caribbean-American Parents of  
Children with Disabilities, Inc. (AFCAMP)  
In support of Funding for Legal Services**

My name is Sheila Harris. I am the family support and school coordinator for AFCAMP, a parent advocacy organization whose central mission is to educate, empower, and support parents of children with disabilities in the cities of Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, and New Haven. I am here today to speak in support of increased funding to the legal services programs in Connecticut.

AFCAMP has always collaborated closely with the legal services programs in Connecticut: Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Connecticut Legal Services, and New Haven Legal Assistance. Our AFCAMP community is the same community served by legal services, with the same compelling concerns: access to appropriate education, juvenile justice issues, and child protection issues. When our parents' issues reach the level where we know they need an attorney involved, the legal services programs have always been there to help, from providing legal information, to giving family-specific advice, to direct representation.

Recently, Greater Hartford Legal Aid has assisted many AFCAMP families whose child was without an appropriate education plans and school placement. Recently, Greater Hartford Legal Aid also assisted one of our families with a difficult expulsion case, ensuring that the child, who was disabled, continued to receive an appropriate educational plan during the period of the expulsion, so he could learn.

In addition to education-related work, the legal services programs have been invaluable when we refer families who need help in other legal areas, including housing, family, employment, and public benefits. Their help in these areas prevents families from falling apart.

Our families rely heavily on the state legal services program. On behalf of AFCAMP families and many other families across the state, I urge you to support funding for legal services to ensure their continued work for the low-income community. Without legal services' help, our families would be put out on the street, denied financial support to which the law entitles them, and denied adequate educational services.

Thank you.