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PRINTED IN U.S.A.

INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA-UAW

March 26, 2009

**To: Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and Members of the
Judiciary Committee****From: Robert Madore, Director
Beverley Brakeman, Community Action Program Representative****Re: Senate Bill 1157 AAC Funding for Legal Services and Judicial Branch
Technology**

Good evening Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the committee.

My name is Beverley Brakeman and I am here tonight on behalf of our Director Bob Madore, who was unable to attend this meeting because he is out of state.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) is here this evening in solidarity with the CT Legal Services (CLS) and other legal aid programs in the state to urge you to support Senate Bill 1157.

Legal services/aid programs have a combined \$9 million deficit as a result of the economy. Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) have provided most of legal services funding, but the stalled housing market and near-zero interest rates have caused an 80% drop in IOLTA fund.

It is estimated that this bill could raise approximately \$6 million in funds for legal aid by increasing Superior court fees (about half of which would support legal aid) and increasing the attorney occupational tax.

UAW Local 2320 NOLSW is proud to represent the employees of CLS and that our members have stepped up to the plate so their clients don't suffer. They have taken 20% cuts in pay and hours, increased their contribution to their health care and have been actively involved in working with management to identify

other cost saving measures. Even with these cuts these programs are facing a loss of up to ¼ more of the remaining positions if additional funding is not found.

That said, we are here today because we know this is not about member's jobs alone. This is about the jobs our members do to help Connecticut's neediest residents. This is about their deep commitment to their clients and the incredible wealth of knowledge and experience they have developed practicing law to help poor and low income residents of this state.

We have heard some lawmakers say that these jobs could be done pro bono by white collar lawyers donating their time. This won't work. This type of legal assistance requires a high degree of expertise and knowledge of Medicaid, medicare, foreclosure, housing, healthcare, disability, consumer, domestic violence and other types of laws. It is a myth to think that any lawyer can just pick up and do the work of our legal aid attorneys.

The legal aid network in Connecticut, as you know, provides urgently needed legal services throughout the state that save the state money by:

- a. helping people keep a job or find other means of support;
- b. finding ways for people to stay in their homes rather than homeless;
- c. assisting individuals in getting appropriate medical and behavioral health keeping them from having to access costly emergency care;
- d. securing access to quality education for children and those with disabilities;
- e. protecting consumers, especially elderly and disabled individuals, from costly consumer scams;
- f. avoiding harmful discrimination based on race, ethnicity, disability or source of income.
- g. Finding legal and other resources for victims of domestic violence.

In essence, CLS and the other legal aid program maximize the impact of their efforts by undertaking cases and projects that cost-effectively benefit large numbers of needy people.

Without your assistance, people in this state will suffer. There is no question about that and we look to you to help restore this lost funding so our attorneys can continue to be a vital part of the state's safety net for low income individuals and families.

Thank you.

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