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

® **RON GETTELFINGER, President**



ELIZABETH BUNN, Secretary-Treasurer

December 9, 2009

To: Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and Members of the
Appropriations Committee

From: Robert Madore, Director
Beverley Brakeman, Community Action Program Representative

Re: Governor Rell's Deficit Mitigation Plan

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the committee.

My name is Beverley Brakeman and I am here on behalf of our Director Bob Madore.

The UAW urges you to reject Governor Rell's degrading and immoral deficit mitigation plan and find adequate funding for legal services, domestic violence and other programs that help the poor and needy in this state.

We understand that cuts are needed to balance the state budget, but this plan does so on the backs of poor people, old people, sick people, children, disabled people, crime victims and others who should be able to rely upon their government for help.

As President Obama once said, "there's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit. But I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit -- the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through the eyes of those who are different from us -- the child who's hungry, the steelworker who's been laid-off, the family who lost the entire life they built together when the storm came to town. When you think like this -- when you choose to broaden your ambit of concern and empathize with the plight of others, whether they are close friends or distant strangers -- it becomes harder not to act; harder not to help."

The UAW believes that the Governor and this legislative body should be entertaining a stronger and more robust progressive income tax, closing of corporate loopholes and other measures designed to raise revenue rather than cut programs and services to those in need.

The Governor's attempt to raise revenue with an income tax increase to 6.5% on individuals earning \$500,000 annually and joint filers earning \$1 million more is not enough. We knew it then and are living it today.

More specifically, we are gravely concerned about the cuts to programs providing legal aid to the state's neediest residents. The UAW represents thousands of legal service workers in the country and several hundred here in CT -- most of whom work at CT Legal

Services. They are members of UAW Local 2320, the National Organization of Legal Service Workers.

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 becoming 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. helping victims of domestic violence find safety.

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

All of this comes in the context of a \$16 million drop in IOLTA funding, which had been the basic funding for legal services. Last year, the legislature increased the basic budget line for legal services from \$1 million to \$1.5 million, and established new revenues through court filing fees. Even with that assistance, our members and their managers at CT Legal Services have two unpaid days each month.

There are three problems being faced by legal aid programs in this state today:

1. the \$16 million drop in IOLTA funds;
2. the Judicial branch is now reporting that it has zero funds available to pay any of the \$1.5 million budget line item to fund legal aid – this is due to cutbacks to the Judicial “other expenses” line;
3. Governor Rell has proposed taking money away from the legal services filing fee measure passed last year to fund other programs.

So, at the risk of repeating myself we urge you to reject Governor Rell’s plan and find adequate funding for legal services, domestic violence and other programs that help the poor and needy in this state.

Thank you.

RM/jl
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