

February 23, 2009

**Testimony of Rachel Davis, Friendship Center of New Britain,
In support of crisis funding for Legal Aid
Before the Appropriations Committee**

Hello. My name is Rachael Davis and I am the Beyond Shelter CT Program Housing Coordinator at the Friendship Service Center of New Britain, Inc. The Friendship Service Center, whose overall goal is to end homelessness in greater New Britain, offers services to those who are poor, hungry and homeless. We are one of the many hundreds of social service agencies in Connecticut that **depend** on legal services lawyers to help our clients in crisis situations.

I am here to testify regarding the Governor's budget. As you know, declining real estate transactions, the largest contributors to the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) has meant that IOLTA revenue has collapsed so Legal Services is facing HUGE cuts. Any cuts to their services would be disastrous for our clients because they can not afford private attorneys. I am here to urge the Appropriations committee to approve a major increase in state funding of legal services.

In the past eight years, Beyond Shelter CT has worked with the homeless population to help families and individuals find decent, safe, affordable housing. Follow-up support services are provided to both tenants and landlords with the primary goal of helping tenants retain their housing and NOT become homeless again.

Housing retention and stability are affected by a range of factors; job loss or dramatic change in income or benefits, physical and mental health disabilities, tenant-landlord rights & responsibilities involving disputes and discriminatory practices, immigration and identity issues, obtaining legal assistance with familial difficulties like divorce, child support or domestic violence, lack of representation through the process of acquiring disability benefits, to learning how to keep the heat and electricity from being shut-off ... a basic necessity for the well-being of small children and the elderly.

(over)

Over and over again, I have sought and continue to seek the guidance and counsel of Legal Services lawyers to help my clients. In each of the above categories, these dedicated lawyers have helped many of my clients resolve and/or obtain restitution given their specific circumstances and need. There are not enough legal services lawyers to represent all the people who need help, so increased funding is desperately needed.

It is without equivocation that Legal Services lawyers provide high quality, invaluable services to people who otherwise cannot afford private attorneys. Now, more than ever, is the time for our state government to say we can provide urgently needing funding. Legal services lawyers do important work in my community and my neighbor's community. If their services are cut, more people will be homeless, fewer people will get the government help they need and our clients will be in even deeper trouble during these desperate economic times.