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To Whom it May Concern:

I write to urge you to support measures that will increase funding to legal service providers in the state. I am an attorney in private practice and I serve on the Board of Directors for Greater Hartford Legal Aid. Long before I had the privilege to serve the agency in this capacity, I witnessed first-hand how critical the services they provide are to the communities they serve.

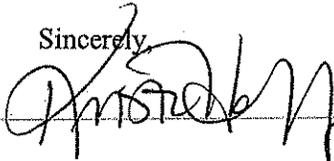
My practice focuses on immigration law and it is through this prism that I view and appreciate the enormous impact legal service providers have had. One of the most vulnerable populations in this state (and in this country) are immigrant victims of family violence and other crimes. Statewide, legal service providers have represented countless numbers of victims, primarily women, who are abused, physically and emotionally, by their spouse or other family members (who are typically American citizens). Sadly, there is an endless stream of people who qualify for special legal status as a result of their incredible suffering. The path to gain this status is complicated and arduous. Were it not for the legal aid organizations, many of these victims would still be victims today and many of the people who perpetrated crimes against them would still be at large.

The vast majority of these people are poor and scared. They lack the ability to hire private attorneys. I have worked personally with attorneys at all of the agencies in Connecticut and without exception they are the most dedicated, professional and competent lawyers I have had the pleasure to work with.

Without proper funding, the agencies in Connecticut will not be able to maintain their staff. The severity of this crisis cannot be overstated. In the area of immigrant victims alone, the loss of qualified attorneys will undoubtedly mean an increase in the number of people who will stay with their abusers. Not surprisingly, this often means that children will stay in situations where they also are victims or witnesses of family violence.

I understand and sympathize with how challenging it will be to assign more funding in a time when budgets must be slashed. But it is precisely because of these challenging times that maintaining legal services is so critical. The economic crisis has hit legal service providers perhaps more harshly than any other industry because the budget cuts affect not just the people who lose their jobs. The true victims are the thousands of Connecticut residents who desperately require their services. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kristin Hoffman