



To: Appropriations Committee
From: Sandra Koorejian
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Re: Funding for Legal Services

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New Haven Legal Assistance Association (LAA) provides support to many victims of domestic violence that they won't receive anywhere else. For over ten years, LAA and Domestic Violence Services of Greater New Haven (DVS) have been in a partnership that has provided civil legal assistance to victims; joint advocacy by attorneys and our advocates; and cross-training to enhance each others' skills. Their work with victims with language barriers and immigrants has been exceptional. Our low income clients desperately need them because there is no one else to provide legal services that keep them and their children safe at home. Our services complement each other.

LAA has worked with hundreds of our clients over the years. LAA attorneys not only possess the most up to date knowledge regarding victims' legal rights, they are also sensitive to victims' issues. They are clear about what the courts can and can't do in resolving matters and make good use of community resources. Their prompt availability gives our clients the encouragement they need to deal with the often confusing and intimidating court process. Communication between our offices has been fluid.

The following case illustrates how our close collaboration helped a woman become and stay safe. "Claudine," (not her real name) called our hotline because she was being stalked by her former boyfriend, "Brad" (not his real name). Brad had been physically abusive and controlled her finances. She recently terminated the relationship, but he refused to stay away from her. DVS staff helped her prepare the temporary restraining order application and we referred her to a LAA attorney to represent her at the court hearings. In the meantime, DVS helped her change her phone number to an unlisted number and arranged to change the locks to her apartment for additional security. We explained to her that she would need to call the police if Brad attempted to contact her or came to her apartment. Brad didn't violate the order. He did sue her in small claims court, and LAA represented her in this matter as well. He lost. In the beginning, Claudine was very fearful of Brad, but as a result of the collaborative safety planning we did, and her involvement in a support group where she learned that she wasn't alone with this problem, she grew to trust the system and her confidence in her freedom grew. She was diligent about attending all hearings and stayed in touch with us about her situation. We helped her renew the restraining order at the end of six months. DVS and LAA worked together on Claudine's behalf for about eight months, during which time Brad did not

contact her. We encouraged her to call us if she needed us. She was appreciative of our help, and stated that she was looking ahead. We have not heard from her.

LAA is unique and especially necessary during these difficult economic times as more and more victims find themselves out of work and unable to manage. They possess a blend of legal and social work skills that helps them engage clients quickly and serve them competently. Without LAA, there will be a huge gap in services for this very vulnerable population.