



*Advocating for Older Adults of Today and Tomorrow*

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Testimony of

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Connecticut Commission on Aging

Appropriations Committee

Governor's Budget Proposal: Judicial and Corrections/Legal Services Funding

February 24, 2009

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the crisis affecting providers of legal services to Connecticut's low-income households.

As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is the independent state agency solely devoted to enhancing the lives of the present and future generations of our state's older adults. For fifteen years, the Commission has served as an effective leader in statewide efforts to promote choice, independence and dignity for Connecticut's older adults and persons with disabilities.

As this Committee knows all too well, today's economic climate finds many businesses, nonprofit providers, families and governments at all levels grappling with increasing costs and decreasing revenues. The Legal Services community in Connecticut is no exception. This important service of free legal aid is provided through Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid and New Haven Legal Assistance. Approximately two-thirds of the funding for legal aid is generated by the interest on lawyer trust accounts (IOLTA). Through no mismanagement or fault, IOLTA has fallen victim to the stock market crisis and its revenue has dropped significantly in the past year. This precipitous decline puts legal services at serious risk in our state. It should be noted that the legal services community has already taken steps to significantly reduce costs, including ongoing furlough days.

A December, 2008 study by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut found that 71% of low-income households had legal problems in the past year, and more than four in ten households experienced at least three legal problems. These legal difficulties mainly revolved around housing, consumer and employment problems, such as utility shut-offs and credit issues. Fifty-four percent of low-income households with members over the age of 60 reported having legal difficulties. Sadly, bad economic times will increase this need.

The Commission on Aging supports legislative efforts to adequately fund legal services in our state. Although economic times are difficult, we urge you to think creatively to ensure that this important resource continues to be available for our residents.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment. As always, please contact us with any questions about this issue or other aging-related issues. It's our pleasure to serve as an objective, nonpartisan resource to you.

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