

Opening Statement of Dawne Westbrook

Good afternoon, Senator McDonald and Representative Lawlor, members of the Judiciary Committee. It is both an honor and a privilege to appear before this Committee today. I would like to thank Governor Rell for nominating me to serve. My name is Dawne Westbrook. I was raised by my mother in Dayton Ohio where I was educated in the Dayton public school system. I went on to attend Fisk University in Nashville, TN on a full scholarship where I graduated Phi Beta Kappa, magna cum laude in 1992. I then attended Vanderbilt University School of Law also in Nashville TN graduating in 1995. I was employed by the Tennessee General Assembly as a Legislative Analyst for one session before getting married and moving to CT w/my husband Tory Westbrook in 1996. I have made Connecticut my home over the past thirteen years.

For 3 1/2 years, I served as Assistant Commission Counsel I for the State of CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. As Assistant Commission Counsel, I was a neutral factfinder. In that role, I had to investigate the facts and evidence and apply the law. The results usually adversely affected one party. I also mediated and negotiated numerous settlements.

I went on to work as an Associate at the law firm of Williams and Pattis in New Haven for 3 years. As an associate I took on challenging cases and advocated as best I could. I tried at least twenty jury trials to verdict as an associate; winning plaintiff's verdicts in 1st and 4th amendment jury trials. I appeared in every Geographical Area court in the state with the exception, perhaps, of Enfield.

For the past five and a half years I have operated as a solo practitioner. I have focused my practice on juvenile law, criminal law, and civil rights law. I have held special public defender contracts in Meriden, New Haven, Middletown, Hartford and Manchester. I have held juvenile contracts in New Britain and Middletown - doing both neglect/abuse cases and delinquency matters. As a solo practitioner I have managed every aspect of the legal proceeding. In the process I have become intimately familiar with the system, the players, the rules, the client personalities, the business of lawyering and the legal system itself.

I have also taught paralegal courses at Manchester Community College for the past three years. I have been a presenter for a number of bar association trainings including the Connecticut Bar Association, the New Haven County Bar Association, and the Hartford County Bar Association. As a 2004 graduate of the Connecticut Commission on Children's Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), I felt my life enriched enough that I became a facilitator for the same in 2008.

I have been committed to public interest and community service generally taking a very active role in the same. I am a member of the Connecticut Judicial Branch's Public Service and Trust Steering Committee as well as the larger

outgrowth of that Committee, the Public Service and Trust Commission as well as a number of the subcommittees. I sit on the Statewide Grievance Committee, the CWEALF (Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund) board and the Governor's Advisory Taskforce on CHRO. I have served in a volunteer capacity as the State Conference of the NAACP Legal Redress Counsel since 2005. My husband, children and I have been residents of Glastonbury since 2005. While a resident of Glastonbury I have served on the Glastonbury Town Democratic Committee. Prior to moving to Glastonbury, I was a resident of Middletown. While a resident of Middletown, I served as a member of the Middletown Democratic Town Committee, the Middletown School Readiness Council and a Commissioner for the Middletown Inland Wetlands Commission. I also made my first and only attempt at public office running for a seat on the Middletown Board of Education in 2003.

While I have had numerous jobs since entering the work force, I have generally spent my time working in the area of public interest law interning during law school with such organizations as the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law in Washington, D.C., the National Center on Women and Family Law in New York, NY and the Service Training for Environmental Progress program both in Birmingham, Alabama and Nashville, Tennessee. While a law student I worked for a local domestic violence shelter often working the overnight shift responding to those in need and for a court ordered program called PEACE (Project to End Abuse through Counseling and Education) counseling men on the effects of domestic violence.

My career has largely been spent working for people who have had something go wrong in their lives - and who have trusted me to see that they were treated fairly. Throughout my career I have managed conflict in some of the most socially contentious issues facing our nation. I have done so because I believe our country and our state are based on notions of fairness, equality, and opportunity. It has given me enormous perspective. It is those very principles that I believe have led to this enormous opportunity. It is that perspective that I believe adds to the strength of my candidacy.

Again, I am honored to appear before you. I appreciate your attention and welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have for me.

Thank you