



# State of Connecticut

## Office of Consumer Counsel

**Mary J. Healey**  
*Consumer Counsel*

**Judiciary Committee**  
**March 23, 2009**

### **R.B. 1157, AAC Funding for Legal Services and Judicial Branch Technology**

#### **Testimony of Mary J. Healey, Consumer Counsel**

The Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) recognizes the vital nature of the services provided by Connecticut's legal aid organizations and supports the reorganization of funding as proposed by R.B. 1157.

OCC has had numerous opportunities to work with legal services attorneys who advocate on behalf of their clients in the fields of public utility regulation and energy law and policy. For limited-income families, utility bills are a significant portion of monthly budgets, often equal to or higher than housing costs. OCC has seen firsthand the tireless efforts of legal aid attorneys to ensure their clients are not outmatched by the significant legal resources available to public utilities, energy providers, and landlords who pass on utility costs to their tenants.

The majority of the funding for legal aid in the past came from the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts, or IOLTA. Because of the housing crises and general economic downturn, the funding for legal aid from IOLTA has all but dried up, causing a \$9 million shortfall in legal aid funding. R.B. 1157 provides for the reorganization of legal aid funding through an increase in various court fees in order to help cover this shortfall.

Connecticut's legal aid organizations operate on a shoestring budget, yet provide services to thousands of people most in need of assistance in navigating the legal system. The return on investment is tremendous, as would be the impact of a significant reduction in funding. Connecticut's legal community and policymakers must take all necessary steps to ensure that this crucial resource is preserved.