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Testimony of Anne C. Dranginis, Secretary,
Connecticut Bar Association
Appropriations Committee
House Bill 5018, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures
and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2011
February 9, 2010

Senator Handley, Representative McCrory, Senator Caligiuri, Representative O'Neill, and members of the Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on Judicial and Corrections, thank you for the opportunity to appear and comment on House Bill 5018 An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2011. My name is Anne C. Dranginis and I am the Secretary of the Connecticut Bar Association, the preeminent voluntary association of attorneys in Connecticut with over 9,000 members who practice in every, diverse area of the law. The CBA strongly supports adequate and appropriate funding for the Judicial Branch in general and for legal aid providers in particular. The CBA urges the Appropriations Committee to **restore funding** to the Judicial Branch so that it can accomplish and make whole the funding to legal aid programs that the legislature intended when it passed the biennial budget last year.

During the 2009 legislative session, the General Assembly passed and the Governor signed into law Public Act 09-152, An Act Concerning the Interest Earned On Lawyers' Clients' Funds Account Program and the Transfer of Certain Court Fees to Fund Such Program, which is expected to generate \$7.8 million annually to benefit legal aid programs. This amount will help prevent a financial disaster and the potential collapse of the state's legal aid system – but only by the barest of margins. That funding source, together with an additional \$1.5 million which the legislature included in the Judicial Branch's other expenses line item for legal aid providers, are critical to the ability of legal aid programs to continue to deliver legal services to the poor of this State at no fee.

Unfortunately, as a result of widely publicized cuts to the Judicial Branch's budget, including its other expenses line item, legal aid providers have not received the \$1.5 million from the branch.

The CBA is greatly concerned about the precarious financial situation of legal aid. Legal aid programs have reduced staff and increased unpaid days, resulting in loss of service to the poor. The Judicial Branch's lack of funds to pay the \$1.5 million appropriation to legal aid to the poor (funds which were specified in the state's budget narrative) has increased the risk of further cuts in legal aid at a time when the needs of our poorest citizens will result in increased demand for such services.

Our members are equally concerned about the Judicial Branch's overall budget situation and the pressures it is under to make cuts that do not endanger the core functions of the Branch. The impending closure of three courthouses and six law libraries has alarmed many lawyers, clients and citizens. Access to justice – including access to the courtrooms and to the libraries that house legal resources and research tools – must be maintained at its highest and best levels or public confidence in our judicial system may erode as further cuts place additional obstacles to that access.

The CBA fully understands and appreciates the challenging fiscal and economic conditions the State of Connecticut faces. We urge the General Assembly to work with the Executive and Judicial Branches to restore funding to the Judicial Branch's budget so that it can fulfill the legislature's intent to provide adequate funding to legal aid programs. We further urge the branches to work collaboratively to ensure that the Judicial Branch receives adequate funding to meet its primary purpose of operating a fair, efficient and open court system.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.