

2/9/10

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Nilda Planas, I have been an employee of CLS for the past 32 years working in the Bpt office. I am a legal assistant/bi-lingual interpreter.

I want to thank you, the appropriations committee, for giving me this opportunity to come before you and testify on behalf of CLS and to ask that you not cut funding for this much needed and essential program.

Now more than ever, due to the economic crisis we are hearing from families that have fallen from middle class levels to a new level of poverty thus adding to a greater demand for our services.

The legal services that CLS provides are essential to the lives of the poorest of the poor in our communities in the State of CT.

If it were not for CLS, many families with housing issues would find themselves living out on the streets, or in substandard conditions. Tenants paying their monthly rent while living in foreclosed properties but are now facing illegal evictions would not be protected.

If it were not for CLS, many families enduring domestic violence would not have any hope of a better and safer tomorrow for themselves as well as their children. Can any of you imagine what children must be feeling to witness a parent being abused, endure and live in constant fear of the abuser? How can one expect these children to do well in school, be happy and feel safe when their daily lives have been in such turmoil and literally turned upside down? Our advocates work very hard to make sure the victims' rights are protected through our court system in which most can get child support and whatever else they need for a better tomorrow. If CLS were not there, where would these victims go? Many do not have any income; they stay in this sad and dangerous situation because they believe if they leave their abuser, they will not be able to keep a roof over their children's heads. The abuser feeds on their fears and so the victim believe they will lose everything, if they were to leave. We educate the victim and open doors of hope for them through the legal system.

CLS represents school age children in our communities who are not functioning at grade level, due to learning disabilities and or not able to read and write. They have fallen through the cracks of our educational system and children are being shuffled from grade to grade. Middle school children who are struggling in school, cutting classes because they are ashamed their peers will know they can't do the work or because the work is too hard who feel completely lost. This happens because they have not been properly evaluated and have not received the special education they should have gotten in their earlier school years. Do you ever wonder why we have such a high percentage of school dropouts? Consider the many kids that can't follow directions, instructions, fail their tests, cut classes, roam the hallways, and we can tell you that most of their problems are a consequence of having a learning disability. We have been successful in getting children the services they need. We as society owe it to all children to make sure they are in school learning with the proper tools necessary in place.

We represent the disabled seeking benefits that have been denied them.

We also provide services to the elderly, whose limited resources prevent them from getting private representation. We provide legal services for them in the areas of nursing home, consumer, landlord and fraud issues.

It is all of the above and more that makes CLS such a vital and important program for all our communities.

It gives me great satisfaction in knowing that CLS does make a difference in the daily lives of the poorest of the poor. Where would they go if our funding were reduced or eliminated? All of us have taken furlough days in order to keep our doors open because we want to serve.

My job is often to sit at the front desk in our office and greet people coming in with sad and terrible situations. We are so short-staffed already. Please don't put me in the position of turning away a person facing homelessness, domestic violence or lack of serious medical care.

In ending I want to say that like the song goes "I left my heart in San Francisco" well, I left mine at CLS.

I want to thank you tonight and ask that you strongly consider funding CLS, a vital program in your communities.