

The Norwich Superior Court Library Petition

Connecticut's Executive Branch has cut \$12.9 million in the budget for the Judicial Branch, forcing the proposed closure of six law libraries across the state including the Norwich Superior Court Library.

These courthouse libraries serve to meet a diverse range of legal research needs from the judiciary, corporate and government attorneys, solo practitioners, average citizens and the indigent. The physical collections and online services available through these libraries, as well as the professional knowledge and expertise of law librarians, contribute to making Connecticut's court law libraries essential partners in the delivery of justice.

Connecticut's fifteen Judicial libraries annually receive an average of 480,000 web site visits, 250,000 walk-in visits, and staff answer a total of approximately 42,000 reference questions. These statistics demonstrate that our court law libraries are unique and essential.

The proposed closure of the Norwich Superior Court Library is especially alarming because, with the planned closure of the Willimantic Superior Court Library, there will be a gap of 48 miles between the two remaining public law libraries in eastern Connecticut, New London and Putnam. Library users depend upon Norwich's current and historic legal materials in all formats, and they value the court librarian for her unique knowledge and expertise.

Closure of this library will have a serious negative impact on pro se litigants who rely on the law library to gain access to legal materials they need to defend themselves in court. These already disenfranchised individuals often lack transportation options to travel to a distant law library. While we understand the dire budgetary circumstances that the state currently faces, it is essential that the Norwich Superior Court Library remain open. It is indispensable to the city's residents.

"The law library at the Norwich court house is a critical resource for both lawyers and members of the public. Because of the high cost of legal materials, including on-line services, the court library is often the only place where law firms can consult a law librarian and the resources required to serve their clients. As importantly, it is an efficient resource that enables people who may not be able to afford a lawyer to find the information they need to determine their legal rights and obligations. While we understand the state's budgetary problems, we urge the judiciary and the general assembly to explore all funding sources and possible ways to keep this library open." -- Joe Selinger, President of the New London County Bar Association

The American Association of Law Libraries and the Southern New England Law Librarians Association urge residents of Connecticut to join our efforts to save the Norwich Superior Court Library, slated for closure by April 1, 2010. Time is of the essence and we ask that you please add your name to the petition today.

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, join together in urging members of the Connecticut legislature to provide the Judicial Branch with adequate funding to keep the Norwich Superior Court Library open, and we urge the Chief Court Administrator to reconsider her decision to close this library.

It is crucial that the public value of the Norwich Superior Court Library is recognized and preserved to ensure equitable access to the law for all.

Thank you.

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