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TESTIMONY/STATEMENT OF JEFFREY J. OLIVEIRA ON THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION COMMISSION APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – FEBRUARY 23, 2011

Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My apologies for not being able to attend your hearing this evening but I am unfortunately already committed to attend another meeting regarding a school of which I am the president of the school board. Please accept this written submission in lieu of live testimony this evening. I am writing as someone who has represented the rights of injured individuals over the past 20 years. Many times, those individuals have unfortunately and tragically injured themselves during the course and scope of their employment. In this capacity, I have witnessed the effects of what I have come to refer to as "career altering injuries." When injuries rise to this level, my clients' ability to support both themselves and at times their families have been called into question. Imagine how devastating that can be. At first, some of the "extras" start getting cut out of the budget. Next certain bills stop getting paid. Eventually, the financial ramifications can be devastating to the family.

In my experience, one of the few glimmers of hope for these individuals with a career altering injury has been the Workers' Rehabilitation Services offered through the CT Workers' Compensation System. It has been, and I hope it will continue to be, a light at the end of this very dark tunnel for these individuals. This system can provide the means to assist individuals such as these in finding an alternative career to support themselves and their families. To suspend such a tremendously worthwhile program is very shortsighted. It will leave many seriously injured individuals in the lurch and would likely increase the number of unemployed in our state.

Please urge the Governor not to suspend or eliminate funding for vocational rehabilitation of injured workers through the Workers' Compensation Commission. We must continue to provide assistance to those who have sustained career altering injuries while they were doing nothing more than trying to provide for themselves and/or their families. One of those such injured individuals, Mr. Michael Stephens, a client of mine, has also submitted a statement that I have e-mailed to your committee along with this letter. Mr. Stephens is going to attempt to be at your hearing this evening. His story is one of many and is typical of the hardships endured by those who have sustained career altering injuries at work. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Jeffery J. Oliveira, Esq.
Board Certified Workers' Compensation Specialist