

TESTIMONY OF RANI TRUDEAU
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE (JUDICIAL SUBCOMMITTEE)
IN SUPPORT OF LEGAL AID FUNDING

MARCH 3, 2011

Good evening. My name is Rani Trudeau. I live in Willimantic, Connecticut. I am here to advocate for funding of Legal Aid for low-income and elderly people. I am disabled. Because of the help Legal Aid provided me when I was very ill and vulnerable, I am now able to live in the community.

I have relied on Connecticut Legal Services many times in the past. In 2003, when CT changed the Medicaid program and I lost Medicaid funding for transportation to my psychologist in West Hartford, I asked CLS to help me. I really trusted this psychologist who had been helping me for over 16 years. It was very important to my mental health to continue seeing him. He understood my problems and helped me avoid being hospitalized. CLS attorneys represented me at a fair hearing and all the way to the CT Supreme Court, trying to keep my transportation. Even though the Supreme Court said Medicaid didn't have to help me with this transportation, I was able to continue seeing my psychologist while the case was on appeal, which I believe helped me stay in the community.

In 2006, after I lost my transportation to my long-term psychologist, my mental and physical health deteriorated. I didn't get care from any psychologist and ended up in the hospital on many occasions. Finally, after my last hospitalization, my doctor determined I should go to a nursing home for rehabilitation in 2007.

When I was in the nursing home, I was not treated fairly. I needed a lot of care. The nursing home tried several times to discharge me back to my home in the community even though I wasn't ready or to send me to a different hospital. Each time this happened, Connecticut Legal Services attorneys intervened and prevented the nursing home from discharging me so that I would continue getting needed care.

In August 2008, I was sent to UMass Medical Center in Worcester due to a physical illness. While I was on my way back to the nursing home, the ambulance attendants dropped me from the gurney and broke my upper arm. The hospital readmitted me to set my arm, but when the hospital was ready to discharge me again, the nursing home refused to readmit me. Again, CLS attorneys represented me at a fair hearing to get the Department of Social Services to order the nursing home to readmit me. Before DSS issued a decision in the case, however, the nursing home finally agreed to take me back and I was readmitted in March 2009 after seven months isolated in the hospital.

When I went back to the nursing home, I needed more rehabilitation which was unavailable at the hospital. I continued my therapies and weight loss program. The rehabilitation services allowed me to move back to the community. I lost 180 lbs. and changed my personality. I

volunteered to start an exercise program at the nursing home which I led from my wheelchair twice a week.

My goal had always been to go back home to live with my significant other, but I needed to regain my physical and mental health and I needed to have ongoing care. When the Money Follows the Person program became available, I was accepted and was able to successfully move back home in August 2010. On the day I left, the nursing home staff and residents threw a big farewell party for me and wished me well.

I continue to volunteer at the nursing home twice a week where I lead an exercise class from my wheelchair. In November 2010, I was finally able to marry my long time fiancé after being together 18 years.

I'm grateful for the help Legal Aid gave me and I urge you to continue their funding. They help people who are very vulnerable, who don't have other options.