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Testimony of Ralph J. Monaco, President  
Connecticut Bar Association  
Appropriations Committee  
HB 6380, An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2013  
March 3, 2011

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Representative McCrory, Senator Welch, Representative Klarides, and members of the Appropriations Committee and Subcommittee on Judicial and Corrections, thank you for the opportunity to appear and comment on House Bill 6380, An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2013. My name is Ralph J. Monaco and I am the President 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 support the budget recommendations for the Judicial Branch contained in House Bill 6380, which budget proposal will allow the branch to carry out its core functions, and to provide access to justice by keeping open all current courthouses and law libraries and funding legal aid providers at the same level as in the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

Access to justice should be the concern not only of the CBA, but to every individual and business organization in this state. The CBA is greatly concerned about the continued, precarious financial situation of legal aid. Over the past two years, legal aid programs have reduced staff and increased unpaid days, resulting in loss of service to the poor. The Judicial Branch's ability to fund the \$1.5 million "grant" to legal aid to the poor is critical to the mission of legal aid providers in providing much needed legal representation for the state's poorest residents. If approved as is, the budget proposed for the Judicial Branch will allow legal aid providers to continue to provide much needed services and legal representation for our state's poorest residents.

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. CBA members witness firsthand the current delays in some districts in obtaining decisions on motions, scheduling court pretrial conferences, and bringing cases to trial. These delays are bad for Connecticut individuals and businesses. Last year, the Branch faced cuts that would have caused the closure of three courthouses and six law libraries, closures that 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 recommended budget for the Judicial Branch is an austere budget which provides just enough funding to avoid devastating results.

The CBA fully understands and appreciates the challenging fiscal and economic conditions the State of Connecticut faces. We urge the General Assembly to ensure that the Judicial Branch receives adequate funding to meet its primary purpose of operating a fair, efficient and open court system and, therefore, urge the legislature to adopt the recommended budget for the Judicial Branch set forth in House Bill 6380.

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