

February 22, 2012

**Appropriations Committee**

**Testimony of Ben Solnit for Legal Services funding**

---

My name is Ben Solnit. I am a volunteer attorney at the Waterbury office of Connecticut Legal Services (CLS). I have been working on consumer and litigation matters for CLS since the fall of 2008. I am also a member of the Board of Directors of New Haven Legal Assistance, where I have served since 1993.

In both roles, I have observed the legal successes and financial challenges of legal services in Connecticut.

Our successes come from our skilled staff, who are experts in their fields, and from the courage of our clients, who persevere against great odds.

For example, Kevin Brophy has been with CLS for 30 years, working in Family Law, Housing Law, and Elder Law, which he now manages for CLS. His efforts helped establish the Susan B. Anthony Domestic Violence Center and the building of low income housing in Torrington. He is always there for the staff and he gives his heart and soul to each elderly person who comes to him for legal help.

Esther Rada came to us after a 25-year career as a lawyer in the United States Air Force. She represents and advises the elderly, including those with mental disabilities. She combines dedication to her clients with superb legal skills. She makes sure that being old or infirm doesn't deprive you of control over your affairs or of your dignity.

These are just two examples of our staff, who, despite pay cuts, unpaid furloughs, and years of financial uncertainty, continue to make a real difference every day for the many people in our state who need legal help but can't afford a lawyer.

Our clients face multiple challenges and desperately need our help to meet them. For example, a victim of domestic violence may have to leave work because of safety concerns, leading to an eviction from their apartment or to falling into debt. CLS lawyers and staff are able to untangle and address this interrelated set of problems.

In one of my recent cases for CLS, we represented a disabled veteran who was being dunned by a collection agency in violation of the Federal Debt Collection Practices Act. We got the collection efforts stopped and secured a modest settlement for our client, who used the money to get his car repaired and a bed that accommodated his worsening medical condition.

Our recent financial challenges began with the 2008 housing market crash and recession, which greatly reduced IOLTA revenues, yet created greater need for our services. Without your help then, we would have faced deep cuts in our staff and in our ability to help our clients. Now we need your help again, as falling interest rates and a continued weak housing market have depressed IOLTA revenues even further. Please renew and strengthen your commitment to legal services for the poor in Connecticut.

Thank you.