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INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA-UAW

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DENNIS WILLIAMS, Secretary-Treasurer

March 9, 2012

To: Senator Coleman, Rep. Fox and Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Beverley Brakeman, UAW Region 9A

Re: HB 5388 - An Act Concerning Court Fees And The Delivery Of Legal Services To The Poor.

Good afternoon, my name is Beverley Brakeman and I am here to testify on behalf of UAW Region 9A Director Julie Kushner and over 8,000 active and retired UAW members living in Connecticut.

I am here to ask for your support of HB 5388 An Act Concerning Court Fees And The Delivery Of Legal Services To The Poor.

UAW represents thousands of legal aid attorneys and workers across the country and here in Connecticut. UAW Local 2320, the National Organization of Legal Service Workers (NOLSW) is our national local which provides services in states across the country to low income individuals dealing with domestic violence, homelessness, housing, lack of disability benefits and more.

**The facts speak for themselves as to why passing this bill is critical to the state's safety net infrastructure:**

1. Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA), the major source of funding for legal aid, has been devastated by the downturn in the housing market and reduction in interest rates. Five years ago, IOLTA provided \$20 million to legal aid programs, this year that number is projected to be \$1 million;
2. The need for these services is growing while the programs are having to cut resources and staffing;
3. There are more poor people in this state and country then there has been in a long time. Without programs like ours, they do not have access to justice or representation;
4. Legal aid attorneys and workers have sacrificed enormously by taking unpaid days off, attrition and layoffs. They are barely managing their growing caseloads at a time when they too are under enormous personal stress and strain;
5. Legal aid is a good investment which reduces the number of unrepresented people flooding the courts, gets people out of violent situations, helps them avoid homeless shelters and gets disabled people access to benefits. NOT funding these services will result in greater cost to the state and its taxpayers if not addressed.

Our members are over-worked, under-resourced and under paid. Yet they have maintained unprecedented levels of professionalism and commitment to their clients and to their employer. They have all sustained pay cuts and reduced hours while managing growing and more complicated client loads and responsibilities.

If this state is unable to sustain these programs the ripple effect ends at your door step with your constituents who cannot get services and assistance and have nowhere to go. An investment in these programs and our members pays for itself and we cannot afford to not to fix this problem.

**You will hear from many of our members and their clients tonight. I am here because I want you to know that the UAW stands together with our members and their clients and I urge you to do the same. Thank you.**