



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
JUDICIAL BRANCH**

**EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DIVISION**

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**Testimony of the Honorable Barbara M. Quinn,  
Chief Court Administrator  
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing  
March 9, 2012**

**H.B. 5388, An Act Concerning Court Fees and the Delivery  
of Legal Services to the Poor**

**H.B. 5365, An Act Concerning Court Operations and Victim Services**

**H.B. 5290, An Act Concerning the Leasing of Judicial Branch Facilities**

**H.B. 5034, An Act Concerning Retirement Provisions Relating to Judges, Family  
Support Magistrates and Compensation Commissioners**

Good morning, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, Senator Kissel, Representative Hetherington, and members of the Judiciary Committee. I appear before you today to testify in favor of four bills that are important to the Judicial Branch. I will start out by discussing the three bills that are part of the Judicial Branch's legislative package: *H.B. 5388, An Act Concerning Court Fees and the Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor*; *H.B. 5365, An Act Concerning Court Operations and Victim Services*, and *H.B. 5290, An Act Concerning the Leasing of Judicial Branch Facilities*, and will conclude with *H.B. 5034, An Act Concerning Retirement Provisions Relating to Judges, Family Support Magistrates and Compensation Commissioners*, which is a Governor's bill.

**H.B. 5388, An Act Concerning Court Fees and the Delivery of  
Legal Services to the Poor**

This proposal calls for an increase in certain court fees and requires the revenue realized from these fee increases be used to provide additional funding for legal services for the poor and Judicial Branch technology. There is a significant crisis in funding for legal

services, and we believe this proposal begins to address that crisis. If something is not done to provide additional funding to legal services, we will see an even greater number of self-represented parties seeking assistance from the Branch because they have no place else to turn. Meeting those needs will require the Branch to focus more of its time and staff resources on the needs of the self-represented, impacting the level of service provided in clerk's offices and in courtrooms.

Some of the details about what fees will be charged as contained in this proposal are being discussed between the Judicial Branch and some bar groups. There remains room for change and agreement. I wanted to stress that at this juncture the details are less important to discuss and can still be altered, but the need for funding is crucial. Because I am certain that there will be many others who will testify on that point today, I will now concentrate my testimony on the need for an adequate, predictable and reliable source of funding for Judicial Branch technology.

Over the past several years, the Judicial Branch has come to rely more and more on the use of technology in order to minimize the impact of the budget and staff reductions on the public. We are operating under severe staff and financial constraints. The Judicial Branch has 250 fewer employees today than we had in January 2011, and only 1 out of 7 employees leaving the Branch is being replaced. The use of technology is vital for the Judicial Branch to resolve disputes and adjudicate criminal matters in a fair and timely manner with fewer employees. It is critical that we have an adequate and reliable funding source for technology. Stable and reliable technology resources are imperative, given the overwhelming increase in the number of self-represented individuals using the court system.

Currently, funding for technology is provided through bonding, which has not proven to be a stable or consistent source of funding. For example, in 1997, the Executive and Legislative Branches accepted a Judicial Branch long-term technology plan that totaled \$56 million. However, over the 15 years that have passed since that time, only \$18.5 of the \$56 million has been allocated by the Bond Commission, around one third of the amount. As you can appreciate, our ability to carry out our technology plan has been significantly negatively impacted by such unpredictable funding.

Accurate and timely court data forms the cornerstone of the entire justice system. Criminal justice agencies rely on the data the Judicial Branch collects and transmits. The

data we enter as cases come to court is the basis of all criminal justice record information in the state. Accurate and timely data entry, retrieval and storage are critical to public safety.

If the funding is provided through passage of this bill, it will be used for the following purposes:

- Replace our criminal/motor vehicle system, which is over 25 years old, making the transmission of data to criminal justice agencies more timely and comprehensive. An updated and reliable criminal/motor vehicle system will be a key component to assuring the success for the CJIS information system currently being developed in accordance with Public Act 08-01.
- Enhance notice to crime victims about the status of court cases and offender tracking.
- Implement electronic filing in family cases within the next several years, providing virtually 24-hour-a-day access to documents and file information; allowing documents to be filed with the court from any computer at any time; providing faster and more predictable calendaring of motions and pleadings; and speeding up the processing of orders and decisions.
- Increase access to court information for members of the public and the bar.
- Provide self-represented parties the ability to e-file civil, family matters and additional small claims documents.
- Expand Help Desk hours outside of the normal business hours in order to support outside users.
- Develop a system of electronic notice to provide attorneys and law firms with information regarding filings, notices, scheduling or other court and case-related information, through a secure server or by email.
- Maintain, upgrade and enhance our technology infrastructure, including expansion of our storage capacity and upgrading servers in order to ensure the integrity of court files and reliable access to those files.
- Provide attorneys with nearly instantaneous 24-hour access to digital audio recordings of court hearings and trials on a daily basis, so that they can review a

day's testimony from their own computer, without the expense or delay of an official transcript.

Let me add that, unlike many other states, the Judicial Branch does not charge the public or attorneys for access to the information we make available on our website, and it is not our intent to start doing so. When we considered the various options that would provide us with consistent and reliable funding to support the technology that is integral to making this information readily available, we made a conscious decision not to begin charging for website access. Passage of this bill will ensure that we can continue to provide free access to our website information.

### **House Bill 5365, An Act Concerning Court Operations and Victim Services**

This bill would make a number of changes that will improve the operation of the Judicial Branch. It covers a variety of topics, so I thought it would be best not to go through it section by section, but to highlight the most significant provisions of the bill.

One section allows for electronic communication of court orders, one more necessary step to move to an electronic rather than a paper based court system. Other sections codify into statute a common practice in our criminal courts regarding fee amounts and their collection. Some sections improve and clarify certain victims' compensation provisions. There are technical provisions regarding the authority of our courts to handle dissolutions of civil unions solemnized in other states, there are other technical provisions concerning evictions and summary process procedures. Some sections would repeal obsolete provisions of the General Statutes. As you can see, each of these items taken individual is relatively minor, but as a whole they are important to ensuring that the Judicial Branch is able to function more effectively and efficiently.

### **House Bill 5290, An Act Concerning the Leasing of Judicial Branch Facilities**

This bill would allow the Commissioner of Administrative Services (DAS) to delegate leasing authority to the Judicial Branch under certain circumstances.

On behalf of the Branch, DAS has entered into approximately 47 leases for facilities and parking, which comprises approximately twenty percent of the state's overall lease

portfolio. Leased facilities include court locations as well as office space for various functions including Adult Probation, Support Enforcement, Information Technology, Family Services, and various administrative and training functions. During the 2011 legislative session, the Judicial Branch proposed a bill that would have transferred the authority to process our leases from the Department of Public Works (DPW) to the Judicial Branch. We felt at the time that although we were a major client of the DPW, we were not getting the service and the timely results we needed to support the diverse space needs of the Branch.

Since that time, the authority to enter into state leases was transferred from DPW to DAS. During this past year we have been working closely with DAS, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and staff of the State Properties Review Board (SPRB) to define a scope and work flow that would promote the timely processing of our leases. This inter-branch cooperative process resulted in an agreement that would allow the Judicial Branch, with the approval of the Commissioner of DAS, to negotiate some of the more routine and minor leases in our inventory. Specifically the Commissioner could delegate to the Branch the authority to handle parking leases, routine lease renewals, new leases at existing locations where no expansion of space is requested, certain lease amendments and inter-agency MOU's.

Passage of this bill is important because it will allow this agreement to come to fruition, resulting in a more efficient process to execute leases without the need for additional staff.

On behalf of the Branch, I would like to thank Commissioner DeFronzo for his understanding of our plight and his cooperation in identifying an innovative and mutually agreed upon solution.

**H.B. 5034, An Act Concerning Retirement Provisions Relating to Judges, Family Support Magistrates and Compensation Commissioners**

The purpose of this bill, which was submitted by the Governor, is to make important technical changes to the legislation passed last year that amended the statutes governing retirement of judges, family support magistrates and worker's compensation commissioners. The intent of that legislation was to apply the same changes that were made to the state employees' retirement system as the result of the SEBAC agreement to

the judges' retirement system. However, in the rush to enact the changes some drafting errors were made. We are grateful that the Governor has made the correction of these provisions as part of his legislative package and urge you to support this bill.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, these proposals are important to the Judicial Branch because they will allow us to operate in a more efficient and cost-effective manner and will address issues that have come to our attention over the past few years. Many of them allow us to do more with less. Others will permit us to do things better. I urge the Committee to act favorably on these proposals. Thank you for your time and consideration.