

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Beverly J. Hodgson

Board Member - New Haven Legal Assistance Association

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

March 9, 2012

Esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee:

The last time I appeared before you it was for my renewal as a Judge of the Superior Court. Now that I have retired from the bench, I am pursuing my concern for equal justice for all as a member of the board of directors of New Haven Legal Assistance.

This legal aid organization has a wonderful history of helping those who would otherwise have been denied access to justice, and unless this bill, HB 5388, is passed, its ability to continue to provide services will be decimated.

For many years, proceeds from IOLTA have been the mainstay of funding for legal services for the poor. Because of the drop off in IOLTA funds from \$4million per year to less than \$1 million per year, Legal Aid is in dire straits. Without additional funding, lawyers with the specialized skills in the areas poor people need most will have to be laid off. The lawyers and staff have already had pay cuts and furloughs. Reserve funds are being exhausted, and there is no realistic prospect of private funds to replace the IOLTA support.

Legal Aid provides the bolts that hold the safety net up for the disabled, the elderly, tenants facing homelessness, and victims of domestic violence.

Please pass this bill to preserve these crucial services.