

## Testimony in Support of Raised Bill No. 5509

Good afternoon Chairman Fox, Chairman Coleman and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Elizabeth Benedict. I'm a novelist, journalist, and advocate for alimony reform. I was born in Hartford. Several of my cousins, Joan Kemler and David Neiditz, were legislators and may have served with some of you. David was also the Banking Commissioner of the state. I now live in NYC and Massachusetts.

I support the provisions in Raised Bill No 5509, and I believe that alimony is important in divorce if necessary to support the lower-earner in his or her transition to independence, along with marital assets and Social Security benefits.

I became involved in alimony reform for personal reasons. 13 years ago, I fell in love with a man in Boston who had to pay lifetime alimony. If we married, his ex-wife could take him back to court and probably get more alimony just because we were married. Simply by marrying, we would invite a return trip to divorce court, the expense and the uncertainty of an outcome.

Years later, in 2008, I found two Massachusetts organizations on line, Mass Alimony Reform and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wives Club. The second wives were women, secretaries and receptionists, forced to use their own money to help their husbands pay alimony to women who would NEVER be required to work or become self-sufficient.

In June 2008, I wrote an op-ed about this injustice for the Boston Globe, which became a catalyst for the alimony reform movement and for Mass Alimony Reform, whose founder and President, Steve Hitner, is testifying today. I worked to change Massachusetts' antiquated alimony laws, and continue to write about these issues. I am contacted regularly by people from around the country who want me to write about their situations and organizations because they feel that no one is listening.

I want to pass on some of what I have learned. Alimony now is gender neutral but because some 95% is paid by men to women, in the interest of time, I'll mostly confine my remarks to that:

1. In 1980, *30 years ago*, New York State changed its alimony laws and decided that the purpose of alimony is to give the dependent spouse a bridge to make the transition to independence, and that the transition should happen as quickly as possible.
2. Those who receive permanent alimony or alimony with no end date appear to be the only group of able-bodied people in the country who have no obligation to ever become self-supporting, even those given millions in marital assets. Welfare recipients are given several years of assistance and set free.
3. Alimony was intended for women whose husbands left them when women had few career opportunities. Today, in a bizarre twist, the new wives of lifetime alimony payers are expected to use *their* economic power to support women who are given a pass at self-sufficiency.
4. I have never talked to a man who complained about paying child support.
5. Most of the men I have talked to are happy enough to pay alimony for limited periods, even 5 or 10 years, if their wives have been out of the workforce or need time to get into it, especially when women have received 50% of the marital assets.
6. Men whose ex-wives have good-paying jobs with benefits are not happy to pay alimony, especially when they are left with less money than the recipients.
7. Open-ended alimony awards and laws with no guidelines encourage alimony recipients and their lawyers to game the system. Biases in many family courts consider women the victims in divorce, even when they are not. For 30 years, New York state law has recognized that divorced women are capable of self-sufficiency. I believe it's time for Connecticut to do the same.

Thank you for your attention.