February 22, 2012

**Appropriations Committee**

**Testimony of Jalitza Irizarry for Legal Services funding**

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My name is Jalitza Irizarry. I am here to support funding for legal aid.

I am the mother of a 14 year old son, named Kevin. Kevin has a rare, but severe muscle disorder called Ehlers-Danlos. The disorder causes him to have a lot of pain, on a daily basis, at unpredictable times. It limits his ability to move, to play, to sleep, and to focus. Kevin requires braces to walk, and at times, requires a wheelchair.

I first went Legal Aid after Kevin's was denied Social Security. The GHLA attorney obtained and reviewed all of Kevin's medical records. He spoke to Kevin's medical providers to better understand his disability. He developed Kevin's case so that the judge would fully understand Kevin's disability and limitations. Based on my attorney's hard work, the judge awarded Kevin disability benefits. The benefits have been very important in providing care to Kevin. With the money, I was able to buy Kevin a computer so that he can stay in contact with others with the disability and so that he can type his schoolwork. Typing isn't as tiring to Kevin as handwriting.

The disability attorney also referred me to an education attorney in the same Legal Aid office. She represented me at school meetings. Kevin had missed a lot of school because of his pain, and the resulting fatigue. He was behind in all of his classes. Because of my legal aid attorney's help, the school came to understand Kevin's disability and evaluated its impact on Kevin's learning and his schoolwork. The school agreed to accommodate Kevin's needs and put more supports in place into his school day. Kevin also felt that he was the target of bullying at school as a result of his disability. The attorney's presence gave me and Kevin the confidence to speak up about the bullying. Because we spoke up, the bullying has stopped.

I am so grateful for the work of my Legal Aid attorneys. They have given me and Kevin some financial stability and a fresh start at school. I don't know where we would be without their help and support.

Thank you for your time. I hope you will support funding for legal aid and the important work they do. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.