

CCDLA
"Ready in the Defense of Liberty"
Founded 1988

**Connecticut Criminal Defense
Lawyers Association**
P.O. Box 1766
Waterbury, CT 07621-1776
(860) 283-5070 Phone/Fax
www.ccdla.com

March 12, 2012

The Honorable Eric D. Coleman
The Honorable Gerald M. Fox.
Chairmen
Joint Committee on Judiciary
Room 2500, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Raised Bill No. 5366
An Act Concerning Civil Actions and Subpoenas Filed To Harass an Individual or
After Numerous Actions Against the Individual Have Been Dismissed

Dear Chairmen and Committee Members:

The Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA) is a statewide organization of over 300 licensed lawyers, in both the public and private sectors, dedicated to defending persons accused of criminal offenses. Founded in 1988, CCDLA works to improve the criminal justice system by ensuring that the individual rights guaranteed by the Connecticut and United States constitutions are applied fairly and equally and that those rights are not diminished. At the same time, CCDLA strives to improve and suggest changes to the laws and procedures that apply to criminal justice. By way of this testimony, CCDLA opposes the portion of Raised Bill No. 5366, An Act Concerning Civil Actions and Subpoenas Filed To Harass an Individual or After Numerous Actions Against the Individual Have Been Dismissed, which would be applicable to habeas corpus proceedings or civil suits by persons who have been exonerated on the grounds of actual innocence and seek damages or compensation.

CCDLA agrees with the points raised in testimony submitted by the Office of the Public Defender. CCDLA requests that if the bill is voted out of committee that language be added specifically excluding habeas corpus proceedings from Sections 1 and 3, so that the new provisions are not applicable to habeas corpus proceedings. In addition, CCDLA requests that the language proposed in Section 2 not be changed. Requiring a "party" to first be authorized to issue a subpoena places a financial and procedural burden upon the Office of the Public Defender who funds the representation of the majority of habeas corpus petitioners.

In civil actions where a person has had three or more complaints or appeals against another dismissed by a state or federal court because such were frivolous or malicious or failed to state a claim, Section 1 (a) (1) would require a certificate to be filed that is signed and sworn to by the pro se party or the attorney "that a reasonable inquiry has been made and that, in the opinion of the attorney or party, there are grounds for a good-faith belief that such action has merit and that such action is not being filed for a malicious purpose or solely to harass the defendant." Habeas corpus proceedings, which are civil lawsuits, should be excluded from this provision. Inmates who file habeas corpus petitions are entitled to representation after the filing and if they are indigent counsel is then appointed by the Office of the Public Defender. The language places on the petitioner the burden of filing a certificate which must provide a detailed discussion as to why there is a good-faith basis *without the benefit of counsel*.

Habeas Corpus petitions are filed by pro se inmates. As drafted, subsection (a)(2) could bar certain petitioners from filing a habeas corpus petition. There already exist rules pursuant to the Connecticut Rules of Court which permit the exercise of discretion by a court to dismiss a habeas on various grounds.

Section 2 would now require an attorney who is representing an inmate or probationer in a habeas proceeding, not just a pro se litigant, to notify the clerk (1) if the petitioner is convicted of certain crimes and (2) if the subpoena is directed to the victim of such crimes. In addition, an attorney representing an inmate or probationer in a habeas corpus matter would now be required to obtain the permission of the court prior to issuing a subpoena to the person who was the victim in the underlying criminal matter for the habeas hearing or a deposition.

The bill requires the attorney to provide notice to the clerk of the intention to subpoena the victim and requires that a hearing be scheduled at which the attorney representing the petitioner must "make an offer of proof as to the content of the testimony expected to be given by the victim." Only if the court determines that the testimony to be given is relevant and necessary to the proceeding will the court permit the subpoena to be issued. The section further limits the examination of the witness so that it does not exceed the scope of the offer of proof and finding of the court. An issue arises, however, in those instances where the victim refuses to speak with petitioner's counsel. How can an offer of proof be made? The addition of this requirement would create a need to depose a victim in order to make the required showing. Currently depositions are not available to obtain the testimony of any witness, including victims, absent exigent circumstances that will render the witness unavailable to testify. Thus the proposed legislation would achieve a result exactly contrary to that intended.

Moreover, an attorney licensed to practice law in this state is required to comply with the Rules of Professional Conduct in his/her treatment and dealings with the court and persons regardless of whether such persons are represented by other counsel or not. Pursuant to Rule 4.4, counsel is required to have respect for the rights of third persons and "not use means that have no substantial purpose other than to embarrass, delay, or burden a third person. . ." As a result, the language of this section is not

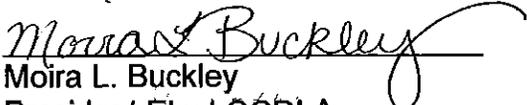
necessary as it applies to attorneys licensed to practice in this state due to the ethical obligations already imposed.

Section 3 would require court authorization prior to the issuance of a subpoena against the defendant. The defendant in a habeas proceeding, typically the Commissioner of Correction or the Warden, is referred to as the *Respondent*. This bill would place additional burdens on the petitioner's counsel in habeas cases and prohibit a subpoena to issue for the Department of Corrections where an inmate or probationer has had 3 or more complaints or appeals against the Department of Correction dismissed as "frivolous or malicious or failed to state a claim upon which relief may be granted." Because appeals are included, a single case could result in three dismissals: the original Superior Court ruling, a dismissal by the Appellate Court and a dismissal by the Supreme Court. Thus a single unsuccessful habeas petition would satisfy the '3 or more' requirement and forever subject a person to the requirement of a sworn certificate of merits and the risk of financial or disciplinary sanctions if a Court disagrees with the assessment of merit.

As in Section 2, this proposed language would require that counsel "make an offer of proof as to the content of the testimony expected to be given" at a hearing. Habeas petitions are routinely filed pro se by persons who are not legally trained in the law. These additional hearings impact upon the petitioner's right to access to courts.

For these reasons, CCDLA opposes portions of this bill identified herein.

Respectfully submitted,
CCDLA

By, 
Moira L. Buckley
President Elect CCDLA