

Testimony in Support of RB 5509

Testimony of Sarah Jancosek Torff

I am a 57 year old woman who was divorced two years ago in Illinois, a state which does not provide financial windfalls for divorced women. There is rarely, if ever, such a thing as lifetime alimony. At most, alimony is awarded for 1/3 the length of the marriage. I was a homemaker for most of my 23 years of marriage. Now I am remarried and re-tooling for the 2nd half of life: getting a master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language and working part time. No matter how hard I work teaching ESL to adults and college students, it is highly unlikely that I will ever earn the \$45,000+ a year my husband sends his ex-wife, who refuses to get even a part time job, even though she is healthy and able-bodied, and the same age as myself.

Even more discouraging is that now as I am working diligently to put myself back on secure financial ground after the devastation of my own divorce, I must constantly be worried about the financial uncertainty of retirement because of my husband's lifetime alimony. If my husband's petition to eliminate or reduce his ex-wife's lifetime alimony at his retirement is denied, I will have to, in essence, subsidize such a judgment by working in to my 70s and beyond, if necessary. Because this provision of my husband's divorce is so uncertain, we cannot plan for retirement or be certain that our hard work and savings will be enough to carry us through our later years, or through disability or serious illness.

As a former lifetime resident of Illinois I was shocked to learn about the divorce laws in Connecticut, and how lopsided they are. Unless a former spouse has serious, profoundly debilitating or life threatening illness, Illinois law does not view divorce as a

free pass for the formerly non-working, homemaking spouse. As it was explained to me by several family law attorneys and a judge, the purpose of alimony, or "maintenance" as they call it there, is to help the spouse get back on her/his feet – get trained to work and becoming a self-sustaining, contributing member of society. I am willing and able to do this. Why are ex-spouses in Connecticut entitled to do nothing at someone else's expense?