

**TESTIMONY OF MAGISTRATE SUSAN DIXON
IN SUPPORT OF
S. B. 8, A PROPOSED ACT TO INCREASE THE RATE OF PAY FOR SMALL CLAIMS
MAGISTRATES
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 22, 2013**

Madam Chairwomen Harp and Walker, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Susan Dixon, from Norfolk, and I am currently serving as a Magistrate in the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch. I have practiced law for over thirty years, and was appointed a Magistrate in 2011. I am a member of the Board of Directors and Secretary of the Connecticut Magistrates Association.

I am speaking today in support of S. B. 8, a bill that would raise the rate of pay for Magistrates. We preside over and adjudicate Small Claims (up to \$5,000.00), Housing Small Claims and Criminal Infractions cases, including motor vehicle offenses. We work on a per diem basis, from about 20 to a maximum of 80 days per year, in courts all around the State. If our pay were increased 100%, the cost to the State would be about \$100,000.00 per year for the entire group of us.

In order to become appointed as a Magistrate, one must have graduated from an accredited law school, and have a current, valid and unblemished license to practice law in the State of Connecticut. In addition, we must pass a rigorous background check, have stellar references, and demonstrate a sincere commitment to public service. Because the citizens of the State deserve the very best people to sit as Magistrates, we must also have had many years of experience in practice, and demonstrate a broad base of legal knowledge. We are required to preside over and adjudicate cases involving technical points of law and complex issues, and we are obligated to render a written opinion in every contested small claims case. Many of us travel long distances to the courts around the state at our own expense. Often we must spend long hours researching case law and statutes in order to write more detailed opinions in the days following a highly contested hearing.

You have heard, or will hear testimony from my fellow Magistrates, with whom I agree, certain essential facts for your consideration in deciding whether to approve this Bill. It is a fact that we have never benefited from an increase in per diem compensation since the program came into effect in 1985, although the cost of living has surely and steadily increased, as have the pay rates of many comparable positions. We receive no additional compensation, other than the current per diem pay, regardless of travel expenses, or other costs related to our work. We would, for example, greatly appreciate being allowed to pay for and enjoy the advantage of participating in the State's healthcare insurance plan, which would have no cost impact to the State at all.

We collectively hear and decide approximately 20,000 cases per year. Any one Magistrate can regularly have over thirty (30) small claims cases on their docket on an average day. Additionally, on other days, we have to review and sign each and every infraction disposition on a docket that often includes criminal infractions and motor vehicle trials. We strive every day to give all our fellow citizens the care, attention, respect and justice they deserve whenever they come before us.

We ask only to be compensated in a fair and equitable manner for our service to the State.

Thank you for your attention in considering S. B. 8.

Respectfully,
Susan Dixon