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Mary Oppenheim <attorneyoppenheim@gmail.com>  
Friday, March 22, 2013 7:48 AM  
AppropriationTestimony  
Please support Senate Bill 8

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

1985. Back to the Future, with a youthful Michael J. Fox in the lead, was the top box office draw that year. The Cosby Show was number one on television. The average home price was about \$85,000 and a loaf of bread set you back only 55 cents. This was 1985, the last time our magistrates in Connecticut received an increase in their statutory per diem compensation.

The current per diem compensation paid to magistrates was set by the General Assembly **in 1985** at \$150.00 and **has not been increased since that time**. During that time, the Small Claims filing fee has been increased almost threefold from \$35.00 to \$90.00, the Small Claims jurisdictional limit has increased from \$2,500.00 to 5,000.00. Pending legislation would increase this jurisdictional limit to \$10,000.

I am honored to serve as a magistrate, and am pleased to join other members of the Connecticut Magistrates Association to **respectfully request that you support Senate Bill 8**.

Magistrates serve the State by presiding in the Small Claims, Infractions and Motor Vehicle court dockets throughout the State, hearing and deciding the cases, and relieving the Superior Court Judges of these tasks, thus saving the State the added expense of appointing higher paid judges to perform these critical courtroom duties.

Magistrates are not eligible for workers' compensation benefits and health insurance. Magistrates receive no reimbursement for mileage, although magistrates serve from Stamford to Bantam, Danielson to New London, Meriden to Rockville and all courts in between.

The fiscal impact of this legislation is minimal. The Connecticut Magistrates Association has calculated that an increase to \$300.00 per diem would cost approximately \$112,000 per year for all Magistrates combined. Across the State, there are approximately 15 Magistrate sessions per week. The additional cost per week for all Magistrate sessions would therefore be \$2,250.00. There are about 50 weeks of Magistrate sessions when you account for State and Federal holidays. Fifty times \$2,250 equals \$112,000. The cost of raising the compensation for all Magistrates combined (approximately 90) is substantially less than the compensation of ONE Superior Court Judge.

In summary, Magistrates are dedicated public servants who are the front-line face of the judicial system to the approximately 20,000 litigants who appear before them in court annually. Although the pay of Magistrates has been devalued by almost 30 years of inflation, these dedicated public servants remain the only group of Connecticut State workers who have not received an increase in compensation in almost 30 years.

I join the other members of the Connecticut Magistrates Association in asking you to please support SB8, which provides a well-deserved and overdue increase in the statutory per diem payment for Magistrates.

Thank you for your consideration.

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