

Testimony of Dianette Caquias
February 19, 2014 - Appropriations Committee
In favor of legal services funding

My name is Dianette Caquias, and I am here today to ask you to continue funding legal services. About 5 years ago, my daughter Charlene was a 10th grade special education student who was reading at only a 1st to 2nd grade level. I knew this was not right, because although she has a learning disability, she has average intelligence. I was afraid that she would have to graduate at age 18 and only be able to read at a first grade level.

I called Greater Hartford Legal Aid because every time I requested help, the school or the board of education always had an excuse or would try to go around the problem. Attorney Cochrane found out that over the years, as my daughter's test scores kept going down, the school cut the amount of reading and math help she got, until she was down to less than 45 minutes a day of extra help. Attorney Cochrane got a new reading evaluation for Charlene, but the school would not agree to its recommendations. She asked for a due process hearing.

Soon, we reached an agreement with the board of education that gave my daughter the intensive reading and math tutoring she needed. Now, 4 years later, Charlene is in a vocational educational program that has helped her get some wonderful jobs, including one in a day care center where she gets perfect job reviews. She is about to earn her high school diploma, and can now read well enough to make a career of this work.

I could not have turned this situation around on my own, and I could not afford a private attorney. If not for Greater Hartford Legal Aid, my daughter would not be able to read and would not be looking forward to supporting herself in a career she loves and is very good at. Please continue to fund legal services – they help so many families like mine.

Thank you.