

**Testimony of Roberta Stewart in support of S.B. 31,  
An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor**

March 7, 2014

Esteemed members of the committee,

My name is Roberta Stewart, I live at 901 Kettletown Road in Southbury and I am the Executive Director of AIDS Project Greater Danbury. I am providing this testimony in support of SB 31 regarding the provision of legal services to the poor. I have had the distinct pleasure of working with Connecticut Legal Services, and more specifically, attorney Tom Ford for many years. I first met Tom in his work on housing issues and more recently regarding disability determination appeals for our HIV positive clients.

Although people living with HIV/AIDS have seen remarkable strides in the management of their disease process, there are some who find themselves disabled and unable to continue to work. They find they are at a point at which they must apply for disability benefits so as to ensure some source of income for themselves and their families. This is an emotional and difficult decision, as well as the start of what can be an unbelievably lengthy and arduous process.

Applying for disability requires mountains of forms - applications, releases of information, requests for health records, testing, procedures, affidavits from multiple providers and the list goes on... People do the best that they can to submit everything that is required and then they wait... At this point they have had to stop work and must attempt to piece together a patchwork of resources to maintain their life - their housing, food on the table, transportation to necessary medical appointments, access to life saving medications... All the while anticipating the letter that says they have been granted disability... Finally, the letter arrives, but instead of details regarding their projected income they see the word DENIED followed by the notification that they have the right to appeal this decision... In other words you will not be receiving any money and you can start the process all over!

Unfortunately, being denied disability does not come with some magic potion that suddenly makes you physically able to return to work and earn a living - Thankfully, our clients at AIDS Project have had access to outstanding legal representation by Tom Ford through Connecticut Legal Services. Tom takes the time to research each client's unique situation and

to develop a plan to track down the necessary documentation to support the case for disability. No mean feat, this can take many months and requires a near Herculean level of dedication and determination. I have seen the mountains of paperwork spread on the conference table in our office. And in all these years, Tom has NEVER lost a case for one of our clients.

This dedication and commitment to serving those in need and the willingness to guide them through a seemingly hostile process is shown every day through Tom's work and the work of Connecticut Legal Services.

On behalf of the clients and the staff of AIDS Project Greater Danbury I would like to express our gratitude for the exemplary services provided over these many years.

I implore you to support the passage of SB 31 to insure the provision of legal services to the poor and the continuation of the vital work of Connecticut Legal Services.

Thank you for your time.

Roberta Stewart