

By Electronic Mail Only
to JUD.Testimony@cga.ct.gov

March 7, 2014

Joint Committee on Judiciary
Room 2500, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Letter in Support of Governor's Proposed Bill S.B. 31

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

This letter is being submitted on behalf of Connecticut's four minority bar associations, the Connecticut Asian Pacific American Bar Association (CAPABA), the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association (CHBA), the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association (Crawford) and the South Asian Bar Association of Connecticut (SABAC). CAPABA, CHBA, Crawford and SABAC write this letter to express our strong support for the Governor's proposed bill S.B. 31. We were proud to support the original 2012 legal services funding initiative, which saved Connecticut's legal services programs from the devastating collapse of IOLTA funding in 2008. We now respectfully urge you to support S.B. 31, which would remove the sunset provision from 2012 court filing fees increase, and ensure the provision of additional funds to legal services programs to help them continue to stabilize and recover.

Our organizations represent the interests of many of Connecticut's minority lawyers, judges, legal professionals and law students. We share a common interest in the goals of ensuring access to justice by the minority communities that we represent, and every lawyer's ethical responsibility to support and participate in the provision of legal services to the poor. We personally recognize the need for vibrant legal services programs in Connecticut, as more and more individuals appear *pro se* before Connecticut courts. We are also familiar with the hard work of Connecticut's legal services organizations, and their attorneys, and cannot emphasize enough the importance of maintaining such a vital service.

Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid and New Haven Legal Assistance help over 10,000 low-income people every year. These organizations provide much-needed free legal assistance to low-income families facing imminent homelessness, victims of domestic violence, disabled adults and children seeking state and federal benefits, elderly individuals facing nursing home problems and collection actions, among countless other civil legal difficulties. The need for such legal services continues to grow, and S.B. 31 would ensure a steady and reliable source of funding for legal services in the future.

This bill would ensure the continued provision of quality legal services to Connecticut's most vulnerable populations. Legal aid programs reduce the number of unrepresented people flooding the courts, and help marshal pro bono legal help for the poor from the private bar. Reductions in legal services will increase costs in other safety net programs and delay access to justice to everyone who needs access to our courts.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter of support. We sincerely hope that you will support this initiative to maintain and increase a stable and reliable source of funding for legal services to the disadvantaged.

Sincerely yours,

s/Proloy K. Das/

Proloy K. Das
Connecticut Asian Pacific American Bar Association

s/Erick Diaz/

Erick Diaz
Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association

s/Fallon DePina Banks/

Fallon DePina Banks
George W. Crawford Black Bar Association

s/Andy I. Corea/

Andy I. Corea
South Asian Bar Association of Connecticut