



**Testimony of Victoria Veltri  
State Healthcare Advocate  
Before the Judiciary Committee  
In support of SB 31  
March 10, 2014**

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, and members of the Human Services Committee. For the record, I am Vicki Veltri, State Healthcare Advocate with the Office Healthcare Advocate (“OHA”). OHA is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring managed care consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health plans; and, informing you of problems consumers are facing in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

OHA supports SB 31, the Governor’s bill, An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor. Without this continued funding, Connecticut’s Legal Services programs would lose approximately \$4.5 million in funding to provide needed representation in civil legal matters to Connecticut’s lowest-income residents. SB 31 would provide an additional \$1.5 million to Legal Services programs.

OHA has worked for years with Connecticut’s Legal Services programs to assist low-income residents with complex behavioral and medical needs get the services they need. OHA also partnered with Legal Services programs on the promotion of transparency in state programs. OHA staff knows firsthand the critical work that the programs provide to low-income communities in ensuring access to needed health benefits and protecting the rights of low-income families in fair hearings and access to the courts.

As the Healthcare Advocate, my daily work is informed by my past experience as a staff attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc. In our watchdog role, the OHA staff has worked with Legal Services attorneys in monitoring state programs to offer solutions to barriers to access and to express concerns when policies could detrimentally impact our low-income residents. The protection of the rights of individual consumers through representation by counsel cannot be understated and Legal Services provides the primary vehicle for this representation. The complexity of statutes related to healthcare requires the experience and

training of attorneys such as those who provide superior representation to their clients. OHA does refer matters to legal services programs when they are outside our jurisdiction or exceed our jurisdiction.

Over the years Legal Services has faced significant budget challenges. Every year, the agencies have sacrificed in myriad ways to ensure that their clients do not sacrifice. The Governor and you have helped keep the lifeline of legal services programs available to thousands of Connecticut's most vulnerable.

I support the Governor's initiative to continue the support for the highly qualified representation that legal services programs provide for residents on healthcare matters, juvenile court issues, family court matters, special education and unemployment hearings, among others.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of S.B. 31. If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at [victoria.veltri@ct.gov](mailto:victoria.veltri@ct.gov).