



**Connecticut Conference
United Church of Christ**

125 Sherman Street
Hartford, CT 06105-6004

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 31:
An Act Concerning the Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor
Submitted by Michele Mudrick, Legislative Advocate
Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ
March 10, 2014**

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am Michele Mudrick, Legislative Advocate for the Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ, and I am testifying today in support of Senate Bill 31: An Act Concerning the Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor.

I am writing on behalf of the 240 congregations and more than 75,000 people in our state's churches. In fact, the United Church of Christ (UCC) is the largest Protestant denomination in Connecticut. Nationally, the UCC has more than 5,700 congregations with nearly 1 million members.

The Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ supports the Governor's proposal to address the urgent need for Legal Aid funding. Legal aid lawyers help over 10,000 people each year. Legal aid lawyers help children with learning challenges stay in school and to obtain the support services they need. Legal aid lawyers help protect women from violence and abuse. They assist people in obtaining and keeping safe, affordable housing, and help families get basic health care.

Legal Aid funding is in crisis. Previously, legal aid for the poor was funded through IOLTA (Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts). However, that funding source has declined from over \$20 million in legal aid funding in 2007 to just over \$2 million in 2013.

The Legislature, Governor, and Judicial Branch saved Legal Aid in 2009 and 2012 by raising court filing fees. Seventy percent of the 2012 fee revenues went to support legal aid funding. The 2012 bill includes a provision that would end that portion of funding on July 1, 2015. If this happens, 35 legal aid staff could lose their jobs and 3,750 low-income people with urgent needs would lose service.

The Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ supports Senate Bill 31 because it will eliminate the end date of July 1, 2015 for funding and move some of the court fee revenue from the Judicial Branch technology fund to legal aid funding.

Connecticut's poor people need and deserve access to legal aid. This is an issue of social and economic justice. We therefore urge the Committee to support Senate Bill 31 which, if adopted, would continue the needed Legal Aid funding for low-income residents.

Thank you for all your work and for the opportunity to supply written testimony in support of Senate Bill 31.

Blessings,
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