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**TESTIMONY OF DARNISHA A.
FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
MARCH 10, 2014
IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 31
AN ACT CONCERNING CONTINUED DELIVERY
OF LEGAL SERVICES TO THE POOR**

My name is Darnisha and I'm here with my parents to support continued funding for legal services.

When I was younger, I experienced a lot of trauma. This has affected me to this day and I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Until recently, even though I knew something was wrong, I didn't want to admit it. I had a lot of pent up anger and emotion that I didn't know how to deal with. I was struggling in school. I really wanted to fit in. I felt alone and like no one was there for me.

About a year ago, I was in the 9th grade and I was in a bad situation. I was having trouble in school. I was feeling overwhelmed, betrayed, hurt, worried, sick, and most of all troubled. I didn't want to stay in school or be around people because I was scared I would do the wrong thing.

I started cognitive behavioral therapy focused on my trauma but I was still having problems in school. At first, in therapy, we just worked on admitting there was a problem and that I had a lot of work to do.

I made a friend who I thought understood what I was going through. I had an argument with that friend and it got out of control because I had no outlets. I was suspended and the school was talking about expelling me. I ended up in court, and I thought there was no way out. My probation officer told me that I needed legal help because my PTSD might be related to my problems in school.

I met my legal aid lawyer Agata when I thought no one wanted to help me. I came to her office to meet her, and we started talking about what happened, what my rights were, and what the next steps were. She said she would be right on it that day, but I didn't believe her because no one else was in my corner. She contacted people at the school and we had lots of meetings at school with everyone involved. My lawyer was there at

every meeting, and I started feeling like everyone was finally listening to me and there was hope. Once everyone was in the same room, they started to understand that my PTSD was affecting me more than they realized. My lawyer told me that the school had to help me because it is the law. I didn't want to be scared in school, and my lawyer helped me get a 504 program so I would feel safe. Also, my lawyer helped me understand that I had rights and that they couldn't push me out of school just because I had a disability.

I'm still in therapy, and I'll probably need to be in therapy forever. Now, it feels better that I can walk down the hallway and know that my teachers understand what I'm going through. My grades have gone up to B's and A's. Sometimes my anxiety goes up, but everyone is aware of how to deal with that. I have a pass that I can use if I need to step away from a situation that creates anxiety. I'm more positive. I see myself graduating with the class of 2016 and going to college. I know that even though I have this disorder, I can still be what I've always dreamt of being, a pediatric surgeon.

This experience showed me that I wasn't just someone with a disorder and that I'm capable of achieving my dreams. Legal aid saved our family. Please don't take lifelines from the people who don't have anything else to rely on.

You can't put a price on that, but voting for this bill will help. Please vote yes for legal aid funding.