

**TESTIMONY OF NILDA CRUZ IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 31, An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of
Legal Services to the Poor (March 10, 2014 Judiciary Committee)**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Nilda Cruz. I am here today to speak for the many men, women and children you do not see and many times do not hear about. These are the victims that time and time again fall into the arms of an abuser because they know that without the law behind them no-one will know their story. We know that many people deny that abuse exists in their lives. Even when they are living in abusive homes they deny the fact to themselves and their families.

Let me explain what I do in my everyday life with the help of wonderful people that do this work without judging others. I am the Shelter Manager at Prudence Crandall Center. We are the oldest domestic violence program in Connecticut and the second oldest in the nation. We provide 24 hours of hotline services free and confidential. Services such as individual counseling, support groups, court advocacy, and referral to legal aid such as Connecticut Legal Services.

The clients that come through our doors need their faces and stories to be kept confidential for fear of being victimized again, fear of their abusers finding them, and fear of being asked "Why did you stay " (with your abuser) or "Why did you marry him?"

Behind these questions are the true stories of victims who believed they had found true love, true partnership. They trusted in this one person who said they would provide a safe place and would care for them. People from all walks of life who were either raised in an abusive home or never realized this was possible.

May I share the story of one such person whom I will call "Fearless" (since this is the character she shows). "Fearless" struggled to get away from her abuser whom she met in her own country. They dated for a few years before they married and he brought her to the USA. Her husband began to abuse her. Her children began to imitate the husband's abusiveness. She and her children found their way to our shelter. Fearless was concerned about keeping her children together if she chose to return to her home country. But she was unsure if she could stay here. Legal aid was able to solve this problem by gathering and presenting necessary documents including police reports. Without this work completed nothing would happen for this family. Fearless is now working, her children are doing great in school, services that were needed are being provided, and they have become great citizens. This is just one of many families that Prudence Crandall Center would not have been able to help if not for the services of legal aid. I am proud to say the Prudence Crandall Center and legal aid have worked together to protect the rights of human beings, the right to freedom.

Legal aid cares for their clients and listens closely to their stories. They patiently explain what steps might be taken, why they can take a case or not. Everything is done with a warm heart. I love the work that Martin Wheeler and others in the New Britain office of Connecticut Legal Services do for our clients.

Nilda Cruz