

Testimony in support of S.B. 31, An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor (March 10, 2014 Judiciary Committee)

Spanish Speaking Center of New Britain
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March 10, 2014

Dear CT State Legislators:

The Spanish Speaking Center is pleased to support CT Legal Services in seeking secured funding and the elimination of the Sunset Clause that could affect the services they provide. State funding is critical for the delivery of legal assistance services to New Britain residents and all CT residents who cannot afford to pay a private attorney. Many of those served in New Britain are also clients we see in our Food Pantry, Social Services and Adult Education & Employment programs. It would be impossible for low-income individuals and families to receive quality counsel and fair representation without their assistance.

The range of services our local office provides are too numerous to describe; I most frequently refer clients for assistance with housing issues, disability issues and access to healthcare services. The added value is that they not only help with these individual cases but they perform much needed advocacy work on issues that affect large numbers of low-income people.

Another critical area of expertise that has helped so many of my clients is Family Law and CLS's compassionate attorneys have counseled and represented individuals going through divorce, custody and child support proceedings. I would hate to imagine our clients not having access to these services and protections of their rights. CLS staff provide community education programs to clients and social services agencies to help clients know when they need a lawyer, how to avoid legal pitfalls, and how to solve or deal with some kinds of legal problems on their own. They produce and distribute hundreds of written pamphlets and brochures, in various languages, to inform the public about their rights and about the services available to them. These topics include: Housing and homelessness; Consumer (mostly for elderly); Domestic violence, divorce, child support and other family matters; Education and juvenile law; Public benefits and employment; Health law (including Medicaid, Medicare, and nursing home matters); Social Security; Immigration; and Intellectual Disabilities.

As a multi-service provider to low-income Latinos and others in the Greater New Britain area, the SSC staff networks and collaborates with other groups to advocate on issues that affect our clients; we count CLS as one of our critical partners. Please do not reduce their funding and limit their ability to meet the needs of CT residents who are low-income. It would only create more disparity than already exists in accessing justice within our systems.

Sincerely,

Mary L. Sanders

Mary L. Sanders
Executive Director