Testimony of Alfred Williams

Before the Judiciary Committee

In Support of S.B. 31,

An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor

March 10, 2014

Good afternoon, my name is Alfred Williams. I live in Hartford, Connecticut and I'm here to support funding for Legal Services.

Last year, my stepson Sharif, who was 14years old at the time, had been refusing to go to school. He was also having angry outbursts at home in response to our attempts to get him to go to school. Despite receiving special education for learning disabilities since first grade, and having an average IQ, Sharif had made little progress in school. He had multiple psychiatric emergency visits, had been hospitalized and had participated in multiple extended day programs and in –home psychiatric services.

Despite these concerns, the school district had done very little to help Sharif. We were worried that we would lose him if he didn't have access to a school program with intensive therapeutic supports needed to support his needs and help repair the damage to his self-image. Sharif's mother and I asked repeatedly for Sharif to attend a school that could help him, but we were consistently denied.

We were referred to Connecticut Legal Services Attorney Jillian Griswold, who helped us document Sharif's needs by getting professional evaluations and recommendations. We worked with the school district to try multiple interventions and finally the school district agreed that Sharif needed a private therapeutic school. Sharif is very happy now attending school and is no longer having outbursts at home. He is also more engaged with his counselor outside of school.

Without the legal assistance from Attorney Griswold, I fear Sharif would never have gone back to school. He is doing much better now and we are very grateful for the help we received from Connecticut Legal Services.