

Testimony of Danielle Burns  
In support of S.B. 31 funding for legal services  
March 10, 2014

Good afternoon my name is Danielle Burns and I am a current and past client of New Haven Legal Assistance. I have been fortunate enough to have been served in multiple cases by attorneys at New Haven Legal Assistance in civil court. If my primary attorney herself could not serve my need she has referred me for information from her colleagues that range from special education, criminal, juvenile, and any other area of law that I was in need of advice, resources, or information. Every individual I have worked with in this office has been committed, knowledgeable, adaptable, and persistent in their efforts to assist myself and any clients I have witnessed them serve.

In my experience in the courtroom, it is easy to differentiate between those individuals who do and do not have representation. Those who do not have representation are left to wait in court halls and family relations rooms for most of the day. The result of being financially incapable often turns into the insurmountable burden of self representation in a court case. Are you educated and well spoken? Do you know how to research laws and pick up on procedures? Can you consistently document whatever legal issue that arises in front of you? Can you gather enough relevant information from family relations and the clerks office? Do you dress well and make a good first impression? Are you patient and able to stay calm in a court room full of underrepresented people who await the verdict on whether they can even apply for a job and pass a background check for minor offenses?

If we are talking about help for people struggling to pay their bills and support their families, legal services should be considered a priority. Legal services removes the barriers to housing, employment, appropriate education, and healthy stable families. There is no simpler way to remove social barriers to a successful life than to avoid the complicated legal issues that can destroy it from the beginning. this is the most essential social service that can level out the courtroom and a multitude of other environments for our state's most fragile citizens and families.

I thank you for your time and hope you consider this organization's immediate impact on those people who desperately need a higher and more equitable justice to be served.