

# Connecticut Magistrates Association, Inc.

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## House Bill 6924, An Act Increasing the Amount of Damages That May be Claimed in a Small Claims Action

Judiciary Committee

March 6, 2015

The Connecticut Magistrates Association represents more than 100 experienced attorneys who are qualified and appointed by the Chief Court Administrator to hear and decide cases in the small claims and motor vehicle dockets throughout the State of Connecticut. Our members are appointed for three-year terms and serve on a per diem basis and handle more than 150,000 cases each year. Magistrates significantly assist the Connecticut court system in reducing overcrowded dockets, expediting decisions and reducing the overwhelming work load of the courts and judges.

The Connecticut Magistrates Association is **opposed** to House Bill 6924 and respectfully requests that the Judiciary Committee not act on the bill.

House Bill 6924 would increase the threshold in small claims cases from \$5,000 to \$10,000 of the amount of money damages claimed. House Bill 6924 also opens the door to other causes of actions, except for "actions of libel and slander" that may defeat the purpose and concept of a small claims court system on which most unrepresented litigants in the state rely on heavily to have their day in court without the added expense of hiring counsel.

Any increase in the number of cases to the small claims docket should be coupled with an increase in compensation for magistrates hearing those cases. While this is only fair, it may be a challenge given the current projected state budget deficit. A modest increase in per diem rates received by magistrates in 2013, the first in almost thirty years, had been eroded by inflation and did not keep pace with the cost of living.

Due to the importance of this bill, the numerous issues it raises and its potential consequences for the litigants served, the CMA recommends respectfully that the Judiciary Committee form a Task Force of legislators, members of the Judicial Branch, the CBA, CMA and other concerned parties to review the efficacy and full impact of this bill for the citizens of Connecticut.

For any questions or additional information, please contact Cherron Payne, Connecticut Magistrates Association, President, at (860) 560-6005.