



INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA-UAW

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PRINTED IN U.S.A.

GARY CASTEEL, Secretary-Treasurer

**Public Hearing Testimony
Appropriations Committee
United Auto Workers Region 9A
Julie Kushner, Director and Beverley Brakeman, Political Representative
Department of Social Services Budget Proposal**

Good evening. My name is Beverley Brakeman. I am the political representative for the United Auto Workers (UAW) Region 9A. I am here this evening on behalf of our Director Julie Kushner and our members of UAW National Organization of Legal Service Workers Local 2320. Our members are legal service attorneys who provide services to low income people dealing with domestic violence, homelessness, and lack of access to disability benefits, Medicaid and other safety net services.

We are here this evening to thank your committee, the legislature, the Governor and the Judicial Branch for their commitment to Connecticut's legal aid programs, workers and services. With your support, our members have been able to continue providing urgently needed legal help to Connecticut families.

Because of your support the state's legal aid network has not collapsed. However, the ongoing funding pressures have left our programs at CT Legal Services, for example, with 20% less service capacity over the past 8 years.

We are here tonight because the Governor's DSS budget relies on an assumption that next October, over \$700,000 in Social Services Block Grant funding will be moved from a DSS contract with legal aid to other purposes within DSS. This would end a grant source that our programs have relied upon for decades.

This cut is used to pay staff at New Haven Legal Assistance, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, and CT Legal Services – staff who provide services to thousands of people in crisis with domestic violence, homelessness, and problems associated with being elderly, disabled and poor.

UAW represents members at Connecticut Legal Services, which is the largest of these programs. CLS is already dealing with a 20% reduction in staff, a very tight budget and inadequate cash balance. This change in DSS Block Grant allocation would result in about a \$400,000 cut annually resulting in layoffs and reductions of services for low income families.

We are here because our members, their programs and the thousands of people they help every year will suffer greatly if these block grant funds are no longer allocated to legal aid programs in the DSS budget

We know better than most that this is a very difficult budget year, and that you are faced with many difficult decisions. We urge you all however to once again consider the devastating impact this change in DSS funding will have on the state's neediest residents and do everything in your power to NOT cut legal aid funding.

Thank you.