

# **Legal Assistance Resource Center**

## **❖ of Connecticut, Inc. ❖**

363 Main St., Suite 301 ❖ Hartford, Connecticut 06106  
cell (860) 836-6355 ❖ office (860) 616-4472 ❖ RPodolsky@LARCC.org

### **Judicial Branch Budget**

### **Transfer of Court Support Service Division**

Appropriations Committee public hearing – March 5, 2015

### **Testimony of Raphael L. Podolsky**

The Governor's budget proposes to transfer the entirety of the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division (CSSD) -- more than 1,500 employees -- to the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Correction. We think that such a transfer will cause great disruption without in any way improving the quality of work performed or saving any significant amount of money. It is also likely to cause significant harm to the Judicial Branch's ability to process and settle cases, which is a major part of what CSSD does. We are particularly concerned about its impact on the Family and Juvenile Divisions. The effective provision of court-based services, which is likely to be lost if these positions are moved outside the Judicial Branch, has repeatedly been shown to be both effective and efficient in handling matters that have reached the court system. Family relations officers in the family courts, housing specialists in the housing courts, and foreclosure mediators on the foreclosure dockets are all highly regarded; and the structural embedding of the services in the court system is a critical aspect of why they are so successful. The placement of these employees within the Judicial Branch, where the cases are heard, is the correct location for them; and transferring them to a different agency will create unnecessary problems of coordination and management.

In the Family Division, Family Relations officers investigate, mediate, and resolve difficult custody and visitation issues. They also play an important role in domestic violence cases, where victims of family violence are in special need of third-party investigation. In the Juvenile Division, the legal aid programs have had particular contact with CSSD in regard to juvenile probation, where their effort to reduce the incarceration of juveniles has drawn national notice. Our attorneys have found them to be collaborative and strongly oriented toward creative strategies for dealing with children who often have major mental and behavioral health needs.

We do not see how this massive transfer of employees from one agency to another helps produce either better results or financial savings. It instead risk serious disruption of services that are being well-provided and separation of the provision of these services from the very location where they function most effectively. We urge the Appropriations Committee to reject this proposal.