



Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Testimony of Atty. Shirley M. Pripstein
Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.

Re: SB 951

**AN ACT CONSOLIDATING CRIMINAL JUSTICE, JUVENILE
AND FAMILY SERVICE PROGRAMS.**

Judiciary Committee
April 1, 2015

Recommended Action: REJECT THE BILL

My name is Shirley Pripstein. I am an attorney who has practiced exclusively the area of divorce and family law for over 34 years. I am a past president of the Family law Section of the CBA. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, and Connecticut Legal Services. We represent indigent persons in the family courts throughout the State of Connecticut.

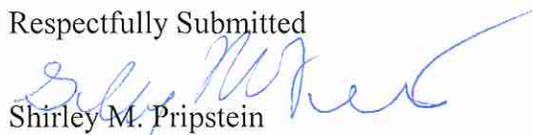
This bill would allow reassignment approximately 1500 of 1800 badly needed Family Relations Officers from the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch to the Executive Branch, a move that would cost the state money rather than save the state money.

Family Relations Officers play a crucial role in the Family Court system. Disputes over child support, child custody and visitation, and use of property while a divorce action is pending are brought to the court's attention by motion. These motions are heard on a day (short calendar day) set aside for the hearing of motions. Parties and counsel are required to meet with a family relations officer before arguing the motion before a judge. Through the skill of the family relations officers, a majority of the cases are settled and do not require a hearing. Without the family relations officers, there would be at least twice as many contested hearings, which would be a cost to the state rather than a savings.

More importantly, family relations officers provide custody and visitation evaluations in appropriate cases at no cost to the litigants.

Connecticut's family court system, including the activities of the Family Relations Officers, are a model for and the envy of many other states who have sent delegations to learn from what Connecticut does. We should not tear apart what is working relatively well. On behalf of legal services, I urge you to reject this bill.

Respectfully Submitted


Shirley M. Pripstein
Attorney at Law

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