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Written Testimony of

Mark Nordstrom, Board Chair
Pro Bono Partnership, Inc.

In Support of the Re-nomination of Chief Justice Chase Rogers

Respectfully Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
April 10, 2015

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to the Judiciary Committee in support of the re-nomination of Chief Justice Chase Rogers. While there are many excellent reasons to support her re-nomination, my focus today is on the extent to which Chief Justice Rogers is concerned about the plight of people who cannot afford counsel. You may hear comments to the contrary, and I can tell you from first hand experience that they are wrong.

My name is Mark Nordstrom. I am the Board Chair of the Pro Bono Partnership, Inc., a tax-exempt public charity that provides free business legal services to eligible nonprofit community-based organizations in Connecticut, New Jersey and Westchester County, NY. To be eligible for our services, an organization must be (1) a nonprofit, community-service organization working with the poor and disadvantaged or otherwise providing important social services, as well as arts organizations, civic organizations, and environmental organizations, and (2) unable to pay for legal services without significantly impairing resources for programs.

Since its founding in 1997, the Partnership has assisted more than 2,150 nonprofits on more than 9,600 legal matters, enabling its clients to more effectively feed the hungry, house the homeless, promote the arts, protect the environment and provide essential programs to children, the elderly, immigrants, the disabled and the unemployed. In Connecticut alone, we have provided free legal assistance to over 750 nonprofits. We provide the bulk of our services through attorneys who are providing their services on a pro bono basis – so I am very familiar with the importance of addressing legal needs through pro bono service, and the goal of having as many attorneys as possible doing pro bono work.

I am also Senior Counsel in the Labor and Employment area at General Electric Company and work with the dozens of attorneys in our legal department who every year provide pro bono services to needy individuals and organizations. And perhaps most significantly for these

purposes, I am a member of the Judicial Branch Pro Bono Committee chaired by Judge Bright which was established by Chief Justice Rogers to address the need for increased pro bono involvement among our legal community. I believe that all these activities make me well-qualified to speak about Chief Justice Rogers' efforts to increase access to our courts.

I have been participating in a variety of programs spearheaded by Chief Justice Rogers over the past four years, all seeking to raise the profile of pro bono service in this state in the name of access to justice. Focused on self-representation (also called "pro se representation") as a critical and growing problem, Chief Justice Rogers set in motion a number of initiatives to bring additional attorneys to the courts to help people who cannot afford counsel. She established the Judicial Branch Pro Bono Committee in 2011 to work on this issue and has convened two state-wide summits which brought together the managing partners of the major law firms, the general counsels of the major corporations, and others involved in the court system. She has also called on the legal community to find other ways to help those who do not have counsel, such as educational programs and court-based clinical assistance. Of particular note, Chief Justice Rogers was the architect of Lawyers Corp CT, a program in which Connecticut corporations sponsor fellowships to supplement the ranks of our Legal Aid Organizations. Further, thanks to the Chief Justice's leadership in advocating for a rule change, in-house counsel may now serve in a pro bono capacity. **The one and only goal of these activities has been to increase the number of attorneys who engage in pro bono service so more litigants can receive free legal assistance.**

Since these efforts began, I can personally attest that many of the Connecticut-based law firms with which GE works have significantly increased their engagement in pro bono service since Chief Justice Rogers' call to action. This goes for corporate legal departments as well.

For better or worse, our legal system was not designed to be "self-serve." It contemplates that parties will have attorneys to represent them, and when people do not have counsel it does not work as well. Everyone involved in law and justice recognizes that we need more attorneys to help those who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. More than anyone in the state, Chief Justice Rogers sees this problem, has called on the entire legal community to step up to the plate to provide help, and Connecticut's attorneys are responding with action. She has used her position as Chief Justice *more than any jurist before her* to address the needs of unrepresented parties. Despite the claims of opponents to her confirmation, Chief Justice Rogers has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to access to justice, and she has inspired many attorneys to take on the challenge.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to express my support of Chief Justice Chase Rogers. Please feel free to contact me at (203) 373-2394 or at mark.nordstrom@ge.com. You may also contact the Pro Bono Partnership's Program Director, Priya Morganstern, at (860) 541-4951 or pmorganstern@probonopartner.org.