



Testimony of James T. Shearin  
President, Connecticut Bar Foundation  
Appropriations Committee  
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Good afternoon Sen. Bye, Rep. Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is James T. Shearin and I offer this testimony as President of the Connecticut Bar Foundation (“Foundation”) to express the Foundation’s concerns with respect to changes proposed to the budgets of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) in **House Bill 5044 An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017**. The Foundation’s simple goal is to provide access to justice to all of Connecticut’s citizens, regardless of economic means. While our organization recognizes that Connecticut’s fiscal situation may require cuts in various programs throughout state government, it urges the Legislature to pause and consider the impact that some of the cuts will have on a population that often remains voiceless.

The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization devoted to funding the delivery of legal services to the poor by providing grants-in-aid to nonprofit organizations providing civil legal representation to low income people. Pursuant to Connecticut General Statute §51-81c, the judges of the Superior Court have designated the Foundation to administer the interest on lawyers’ trust accounts program, the fees imposed upon certain court filings under the Judicial Branch’s Court Fees Grants-in-Aid program, and the Judicial Branch’s Grants-in-Aid program. The Foundation presently supports ten civil legal service providers in Connecticut who address

the legal needs of those who constitute Connecticut's poverty population, a group of people who, since 2007, has grown from 268,880 to 374,772. The Foundation's ability to continue providing adequate funding to these civil legal aid providers has become even more challenging as our revenues have substantially declined in recent years.

One of the grantees the Foundation supports is the Connecticut Legal Rights Project, a statewide, non-profit organization which, with much needed funding from DHMAS, provides legal services to low income individuals with psychiatric disabilities on matters related to their treatment, recovery, civil rights, and housing. Three of the Foundation's grantees, Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, and New Haven Legal Assistance provide legal services to very low-income people to help them achieve safety, housing and other essential services such as education, nutrition and health through a social services block grant provided through DSS. Both funding sources are in jeopardy of being cut this year.

I ask you to appreciate fully the consequences that these cuts may have. For many who are too poor to afford counsel, representation through the legal service providers is the only way they can secure necessary government benefits or ensure that their legal rights are protected; the judicial system and government bureaucracy are simply too complex to handle on their own.

The societal costs of leaving people with psychiatric disabilities and their families without legal aid attorneys to help them access the benefits to which they are entitled or to deprive them of the means to secure their basic human needs are far greater than any of the contemplated budget savings. We cannot, as a modern society, turn a blind eye to those who most need our help.