

Barbara Guida
February 19, 2016
Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
In Support of
Funding for Legal Aid

Thank you Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Ziobron and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Barbara Guida. In 2014, I received help from Connecticut Legal Services in a divorce case against my abusive ex-husband. I'm here to ask you to support legal aid so that there will be help for other people like me in the future.

For twenty years, I was married to a police officer who took every opportunity to intimidate and threaten me. Though I was working with a local domestic violence program, I couldn't bring myself to leave him. I worried about our three young children and how I would support them without my husband. At one point, I had been a real estate agent and made a decent living, but everything had changed by the time I was served with divorce papers.

When I got them, I was immediately overwhelmed. I knew I couldn't afford a lawyer. I also worried that no one would believe me about how horrible things were because of my husband's job. My husband was already hiding money and our house was in foreclosure. Those were really dark days. I remember being cold and sitting in my car, trying to avoid going inside the house because he was there. I had little to no money for gas. If I wanted to buy food, I would have to ask him for permission.

Then I met Attorney Dahlia Grace from Connecticut Legal Services. She listened to me and filed motions so that my children and I would be safe and financially supported until the divorce was over. It was a tough time for all of us. My children were stressed out and started having problems in school. I was so anxious that it was difficult for me to work.

After nine long months, Attorney Grace negotiated an agreement and we finalized the divorce. This agreement gave my children and me stability- financial and emotional. Now, a little more than a year after, I am amazed at how different my life is. I was able to save my house from foreclosure. I am working. I have my children with me and they are doing better every day.

I don't know if any of this would have been possible without help from legal services. Please support legal aid so that other families can have the opportunity to survive these sorts of difficulties also.