

Written Testimony of Dawn Oduor
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing – March 17
In Support of S.B. 428, An Act Concerning Funding of Legal Services for the
Poor

Dear Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I would have liked to be at the hearing in person today, but unfortunately I could not postpone an important meeting at the group home where my son now lives. New Haven Legal Assistance has helped me advocate for my son in several ways.

The first time was when Attorney Sheldon Toubman who helped us get an adjustable hospital bed known as a "Volker Bed". This bed is necessary to position people with gastronomy tubes and vomit excessively, posing failure to thrive and many other medical outcomes. While Medicaid was familiar with my son's diagnoses they wouldn't approve the bed....rather wanted us to accept their bed which did not meet my son's medical need at the time.

The second time it was Attorney Erin Shaffer who attended PPTs with me and helped us hold East Haven Public Schools accountable for denying my son a full year of special education (2010-2011). Despite the PPT recommendation for an additional compensatory year of education, the Town did nothing to plan for this, hoped I'd forget about it. When I insisted that the PPT ruling be upheld, East Haven got amnesia and Erin stepped in at my request to convince them to honor the PPT and educate my son.

The third time - during the EHPS settlement meetings - Medicaid refused to authorize and pay for my son's Pedialyte due to his turning 21. This electrolyte solution had been approved and paid for since he was approximately 8 years of age. I asked for a hearing, again sought help from New Haven Legal Assistance, and Attorneys ShelleyWhite and Erin Shaffer came to the rescue. We were denied Pedialyte for 6 months and the team was able to get an Administrative exception and we started receiving Pedialyte. Unfortunately, my son's gastrointestinal vulnerabilities and his inability to properly retain water overwhelmed him and a surgical procedure needed to be performed at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center on January 12, 2015.

DDS services have been cut by 17 million plus and being a single parent of a multi-handicapped, intellectually impaired and medically fragile child has burdened our lives simply because this "protected class" under the law is not protected by laws that are on the books but not enforced. I am poor at this stage of my life, not that I didn't ever work - quite the contrary. I was the Assistant Clerk of the House under Speaker Irving Stolberg, worked as the administrative assistant to the Chairman of the CT Black Caucus (before it became the Black & Hispanic Caucus). My father was the First African American elected to the CT General Assembly (the Honorable Wilfred X. Johnson) elected in 1957, his term was from 1958-1964). My mom (deceased 7/23/13), Trude Johnson Mero, was a political matriarch in Hartford...the community became our siblings.

You may ask how then did I get to this position financially ...my decision to adopt my son when he was 5 weeks of age. I took care of him at home for 22 years (spiritually, clinically, emotionally, physically - he is quadriplegic). He was admitted to a group home on October 15, 2015, and will be 23 years of age on 3/23/16 (next week). When I consider the fact that he was given 72 hours to live when he came to me my heart and eyes fill with JOY. Do I not need and deserve legal assistance? Of course I do!

If New Haven Legal Assistance's funding isn't there, many of the voices in the community that have been law abiding, faithful, determined, honest and in many cases, worthy of hearing, won't get heard at all. Distributive justice cannot be found in the school systems, medical facilities, nor state agencies and someone must set the pace, meet the mark, and pursue "justice for all." The men and women of NH Legal Services honor the "one nation, under God, indivisible with justice for all." This is a standard that we must not ever compromise.