

Testimony In Support of S.B. 31: An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor

Sharon D. Langer, M.Ed., J.D.
Committee on Judiciary
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Dear Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am a Senior Policy Fellow with Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth and families.

On behalf of Connecticut Voices, I submit this testimony in support of S.B. 31, An Act Concerning Continued Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor.

This bill will help continue the funding for the network of Legal Services programs that provide critically needed representation in civil legal matters to Connecticut's poorest children, youth and families. Specifically, the bill would eliminate the sunset provision on the court filing fee revenue that goes directly to fund these programs. Without this legislation, funding for Legal Services would be reduced by \$4.5 million next year.

Legal Services programs assist children with complex behavioral and medical needs get the services they need, represent at-risk youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and help low-income working families keep food on the table and a roof over their children's heads.

As a former staff attorney with Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. (CLS) for twenty years, I know firsthand about the important work that Legal Services provides to communities across the state. During the past nine years at Connecticut Voices my research and advocacy have been informed each and every day by my experiences as a CLS attorney. My Connecticut Voices colleagues and I engage with Legal Services programs on finding broad-based solutions to the many challenges faced by Legal Services clients.

I applaud lawmakers for stepping up to the plate over the last half-dozen years to help vulnerable families maintain a legal lifeline by funding Legal Services programs. By supporting S.B. 31, your committee will ensure that families continue to have access to qualified legal representation in family court, juvenile court, in hearings before unemployment appeals referee and special education hearing officers, and in many other venues.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of S.B. 31.

Contact information:

Sharon D. Langer
slanger@ctvoices.org
(203) 498-4240 (x 121)
(860) 490-5441 (cell)