CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN

20 YEARS OF ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Testimony Supporting
S.B. 428: An Act Concerning Funding of Legal Services for the Poor
Sharon D. Langer, M.Ed., J.D.
Judiciary Committee
March 18, 2016

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

I am the Acting Executive Director of 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.

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children in **support** of S.B. 428, An Act Concerning Funding of Legal Services for the Poor.

The proposed legislation would permit the Judicial Branch to allot a portion of the funds held in the Client Security Fund to Legal Services programs on an annual basis, and only after an evaluation as to whether the funds exceed those needed to pay client security fund claims. The proposal would also increase very modestly certain court fees, a portion of which go to funding legal services.

As you may know the network of legal services programs for the poor has seen its main source of funding through the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) plummet from $20 million in 2007 to only $2 million during the last several years. In addition, the monies collected from court fees have not been able to make up this yawning gap in funding.

The legal aid programs, which serve approximately 10,000 households per year, struggle to keep their doors open. To cut costs they have let go off staff, enacted furlough days, and shrunk their ranks through attrition.

As a former attorney with Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. (CLS) for twenty years, I know firsthand the important work that Legal Services provides to communities throughout the state. My research and policy advocacy has been informed by my experiences as a CLS attorney helping low-income and marginalized children and families. We at Connecticut Voices for Children engage regularly with Legal Services programs to find systemic solutions to the many challenges faced by their clients.

The legislature has worked hard in recent years to come up with creative solutions to help ease the funding crisis faced by Legal Services. By supporting S.B. 428, you will take another step to ensuring that low-income families will have access to qualified representation in family court, in juvenile court, in special education hearings, and in many other settings.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 428. I can be reached at slanger@ctvoices.org; (203) 498-4240 (x121).