

**TESTIMONY NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF BUDGET
HAUPPAUGE, N.Y.
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DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**

I would like to extend our gratitude for the Governor's support of the new state funding in the 2007-8 budget, providing a total of \$14.6 in general support for civil legal services for low income New Yorkers.

Nassau Suffolk Law Services is the only law program on Long Island serving the poor in a wide range of civil matters for which there is no constitutional right to free representation. Victims of domestic violence, the disabled, the elderly, the poor and the abused cannot pay for their own attorneys if Law Services has insufficient resources.

We handle about 6500 legal cases each year involving more than 17,000 low income Long Islanders, mostly children. Most of our cases involve survival needs like shelter, income, safety, medical care and family problems such as domestic violence.

We are non-profit and funded entirely by grants, donations and government funding. Without our assistance, access to civil legal justice is out of reach to most poor Long Islanders.

Law Services is one of the most successful programs in the nation in designing legal programs for persons with special needs, including projects for persons with HIV/AIDS, disabled persons fighting discrimination, victims of domestic violence, the mentally ill, senior citizens and adult home residents and cancer patients. We are also a leader in protecting the homeless on Long Island. We have won the right of homeless families to adequate and safe emergency housing and gained the right to rental supplements to prevent or end homelessness assisting thousands of homeless Long Islanders. Our capacity for service is greatly expanded by our Pro Bono/Volunteer Lawyers Project, which recruits private attorneys to represent low income clients without charge. Law Services also utilizes law students in partnership with local law schools.

Our Legal Support Center for Advocates provides legal support and technical assistance to every community agency or advocate that works with the poor.

State funds are crucial to our budget because they insure funding to our “core” services, specifically, access to public benefits, Medicaid, and housing, for which funding from other sources is not readily available. State civil legal services funding supports us so that we can assist the SSI recipient facing a LIPA shutoff, the family served with an eviction notice, and the young mother who has no insurance to get her child’s antibiotic prescription filled. But despite our best attempts to serve low income Long Islanders, with over 600 calls a day in our Islandia office alone, there are many callers we have to turn away. This underserved population includes the working poor, who are often burdened with insurmountable medical and housing debt and who are facing foreclosures in record numbers on Long Island. Together with the unemployed, the working poor may also need legal assistance to obtain a variety of public benefits to which they may be entitled such as Family Assistance, Food Stamps and Medicaid to help them prevent homelessness.

We are seeking an increase in funding to \$25 million for civil legal services statewide in the next budget, with a goal of reaching \$50 million by 2010. We are also advocating the creation of an Office for Civil Justice in the Executive Branch which will help insure that the distribution of state funds are coordinated with IOLA and monitor policy issues that affect civil legal services.

Thank you for this opportunity to communicate our experiences in hopes of working with you in the future to continue our important work in the community.