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To: Danny K. Davis, Chairman
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia

From: Betty M. Ballester, President
Superior Court Trial Lawyers Association

Thank you for an opportunity to speak on behalf of the FY 2008 hourly rate increase for D.C. Criminal Justice Act and Counsel for Child Abuse and Neglect program attorneys.

I am the President of the Superior Court Trial Lawyers Association, which represents more than 350 attorneys who practice criminal law in the District of Columbia. I am also speaking on behalf of more than 350 members of the CCAN panel. I have practiced law as a sole practitioner in the Superior Court for almost 25 years. I have represented indigent defendants in almost every type of case in the courthouse, from murders and sexual abuse cases to minor criminal charges and violations of the Compulsory School Attendance Act.

The attorneys who represent the indigent of the District of Columbia are dedicated to their work and proud to be part of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Each of us was chosen after an application process reviewed by a committee of judges and, in some cases, peers. We believe that the indigent in the District of Columbia are entitled to competent counsel when they appear in Court.

In March of 2002, we received an increase in the hourly rate from \$50 per hour to \$65 per hour. We have received no increases in pay since that time. Inflation has continued since that time at a rate of 3-4% per year and the cost of goods and services has continued to rise. \$65 in 2002 would be \$76-\$78 today and that is a conservative estimate. We are asking that the hourly rate be raised to \$80 per hour and that the limit on earnings be set at \$166,400. The increase would keep us on a par to what we received in 2002. We are also asking that this subcommittee make this increase effective as soon as possible. The money has already been appropriated.

None of the attorneys who practices within the CJA or CCAN system receive any benefits. Each attorney pays for all of his or her insurance costs, including health, disability, life, home and malpractice. Each attorney pays for his or her office expenses,

including rent and utilities. Each attorney pays for all of his or her supplies, including research services, computer services, and any office help. Each of these attorneys pays for his or her transportation expenses, including the continuing rising cost of gasoline. None of these attorneys has any paid vacation or sick leave. Many of these attorneys are striving to send children to college and striving to maintain the stability of homes.

The attorneys of the CJA and CCAN panels deserve a raise to \$80 per hour. Oftentimes, they work more than 10-12 hours per day. They also work most weekends. They visit jails and out-of-state penitentiaries. They visit children who are placed in institutions or homes in other jurisdictions. They visit crime scenes, search for witnesses, and often find themselves in dangerous neighborhoods. They do this all to adequately and to competently represent their clients, whether they be adults or children.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of all of the attorneys who are members of the CCAN and CJA panels.