



WESTERN CENTER ON LAW & POVERTY

April 1, 2008

Committee on the Judiciary
Honorable Dave Jones, Chair
California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 3050 –Support

Dear Chairman Jones and Members:

We are writing to offer our strong support for AB 3050, the Committee's bill to protect consumers from sham "legal aid" outfits, and to ensure that every person can have his or her day in court, without being disadvantaged by language barriers. These are two very important issues to ensure our low-income clients have adequate access to our justice system.

AB 3050 would address the continuing practice by scam artists who deceptively use the name "legal aid" in the yellow pages and other advertisements to trick consumers into thinking they are being assisted by a reputable non-profit legal services program. In reality, these outfits provide little or no meaningful legal assistance to consumers, usually to the detriment of their legal rights.

In some cases, an attorney is not even involved in reviewing the "client's" case or preparing the pleadings. In most cases, the pleadings filed are improperly drafted, ignore meritorious claims and provide little substantive benefit to the consumer. In other cases, the pleadings are never filed, despite the firm's solemn pledge to do so. All for a fee that the consumer would not have to pay, had a true legal aid firm assisted them instead, one that provides competent, no-cost legal services to low-income consumers. AB 3050 would help protect consumers from this deceptive practice, by prohibiting the use of the name "legal aid" by anyone other than a non-profit, free legal services program.

In addition, this bill would provide for language interpreters in civil cases under certain, specified circumstances. The absence of interpreters has long been a barrier to justice for our clients, who must often represent themselves in court. Translation problems are particularly acute for the large numbers of rural workers who are monolingual in a language other than English and who cannot access the courts, understand legal documents, communicate with clerks or court staff, or understand or participate meaningfully in court proceedings without a qualified interpreter.

We strongly support AB 3050.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Augusta".

Brian Augusta
Staff Attorney
CRLA Foundation
direct dial: (916) 446-9241

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Minnehan".

Christine Minnehan
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cc: Kevin Baker, Consultant