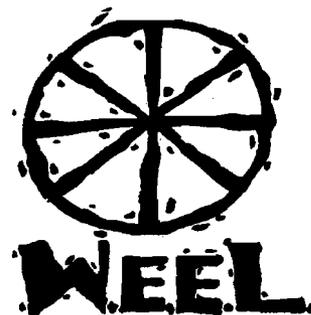


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Dear members of the interim committee,

You have heard an array of statistics on the subject of access to justice. Data is important and it allows us to analyze systems, but what I want to do this afternoon is remind everyone on the committee that there are faces, families and stories attached to every one of the statistics that you have been presented with. They are families who walk through our doors, resourceful people who have made amazing effort toward gaining access to our justice system. They have been denied, referred, denied, referred in a frustrating cycle that is anything but just. We are not attorneys at WEEL so, for the most part, we listen. We listen to stories of eviction from homeless families, stories of parents losing their children for no other reason than the other parent had legal representation and there is often very little that we can do for these families.

One of our members, Jesse, a single father with a nine month old daughter, recently had a major problem with his public benefits. Because of a caseworker error, Jesse was charged with an overissuance of food stamps totaling more than \$1000. He was informed that he would have to pay the entire amount back to the government. Jesse was on the waiting list at Legal Services, but his issue was timely and he needed help much more quickly than Legal Services could offer. Jesse walked through our door, and WEEL was able to guide Jesse through his fair hearing in time to get his family a good result. The problem is, that many families remain on the waiting list, do not have options and have a negative result that dramatically alters their lives.

A justice system without equal access fore every person, regardless of economic status, is not a justice system. People with resources have an opportunity for justice. People with out resources do not have that opportunity. WEEL is thrilled that the Law and Justice Committee has acknowledged the importance of access to justice issues, and we hope that tangible results will come from this committee's efforts. We know that many families are depending on you.

Thank you,

Kim Abbott