

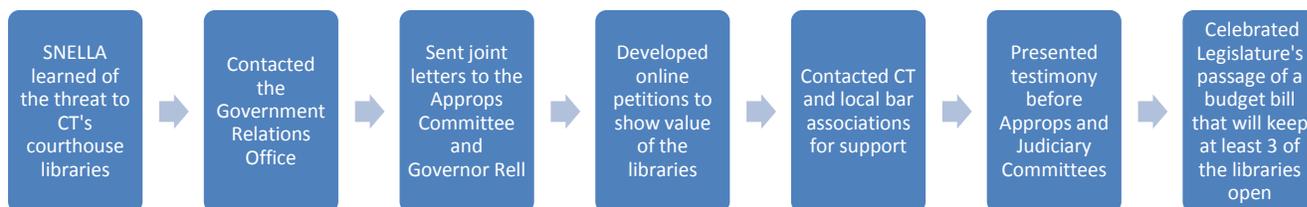
**AALL CASE STUDY:
SNELLA AND AALL FIGHT TO SAVE CONNECTICUT COURTHOUSE LIBRARIES
May 2010**

The Challenge

Last year, Connecticut Governor Jodi M. Rell cut \$12.9 million to the budget for the Judicial Branch, putting the state’s courthouse libraries at immediate risk. In November 2009, Chief Court Administrator Judge Barbara M. Quinn testified before the Connecticut Joint Committee on Appropriations about the need to immediately restore \$7.8 million to the “Other Expenses” (OE) account in the Judicial Branch’s budget, through which nearly all operating expenses are paid. Without restored funding, Judge Quinn said, she would be forced to close the six of the state’s sixteen courthouse libraries and three courthouses.

Nancy Marcove, President of the [Southern New England Law Librarians Association](#) (SNELLA) quickly contacted Mary Alice Baish, Director of the AALL Government Relations Office (GRO), in November for help in opposing the proposed closures. This case study outlines the actions that SNELLA and AALL took to fight the closures of the courthouse libraries and educate lawmakers about the need to ensure adequate funding for these important institutions.

SNELLA and AALL’s Response



Sent letters to the Appropriations Committee and Governor Rell

In the face of the urgent threat to Connecticut’s courthouse libraries, SNELLA worked with the GRO to draft letters to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the Connecticut [Appropriations Committee](#) and [Governor Rell](#) to oppose the cuts and support Judge Quinn’s request to restore funding to the Judicial Branch’s budget. The letters, which were sent on December 23, stated that while we understand the difficult economic situation the state faces, it is essential that the law libraries stay open to serve the judges, lawyers and members of the public who rely on the libraries for access to the legal resources they need. As Judge Quinn noted in her statement before the Appropriations Committee, current legal research tools, in both electronic and printed form, are critically necessary for judges in their decision-making process.

The letters also countered the misguided notion that Google and others who now offer free online access to a limited number of legal resources eliminate the need to maintain the valuable print and online collections available at these libraries.

Developed online petitions and contacted Connecticut and local bar associations

In order to demonstrate the broad support of Connecticut's residents for keeping the courthouse libraries open, the GRO developed five online petitions to save the libraries in [Bridgeport](#), [Hartford](#), [Litchfield](#), [Milford](#), and [Norwich](#). Mary Alice Baish contacted leaders of the local bar associations for quotes to include in the petitions that specifically describe the importance of each of these libraries to the community. Mary Alice also contacted leaders of the Connecticut Bar Association (CBA), who agreed to help us in our efforts to save the libraries. Having the support of these local leaders was tremendously helpful in showing the broad support for these law libraries in their communities.

Presented testimony before the Appropriations and Judiciary Committees

On February 9, Nancy Marcove and retired courthouse law librarian Jonathan Stock appeared before the Appropriations Committee to speak in opposition to the proposed closures. They emphasized the importance of the courthouse libraries to their local communities, especially pro se litigants. They also responded to a number of key questions from several members of the committee about the value of keeping the law libraries open with up-to-date materials, and the vital role law librarians play in assisting all types of libraries users.

On February 22, SNELLA sent a [letter](#) to the Appropriations Committee. Attached were the petitions, which had been posted for just over a month, with approximately 1140 signatures. We were very pleased with this strong showing of support for the libraries.

On February 26, Jonathan Stock and Camilla Tubbs, Chair of the AALL Government Relations Committee and Reference Librarian and Lecturer in Legal Research at Yale Law School's Lillian Goldman Library, presented testimony on behalf of [SNELLA](#) and [AALL](#) before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary in support of a bill that could restore funding to the Judicial Branch and help save the libraries, *An Act Concerning Funding for the Judicial Branch* ([House Bill 5148](#)). A representative from the CBA and many local bar association leaders also testified in support of the bill.

The bill would revise the state's law so that the Judicial Branch's budget would be presented directly to the Legislature rather than to the Executive Branch. The bill would also exempt the Judicial Branch from having to reduce its "Other Expenses" account to the fiscal year 2007 level, which would help keep the law libraries open to the public.

On March 3, the Judiciary Committee favorably reported House Bill 5148 out of committee by a vote of 26-6. It was then sent to the Appropriations Committee for consideration. In response to this development, SNELLA issued an [action alert](#) asking Connecticut law librarians to contact their state senator and state representative in support of the bill.

Unfortunately, on March 25, the Appropriations Committee stripped out the language restoring the OE funding and favorably reported the bill, as amended. Without the restored funding, the Milford, Norwich and Willimantic libraries were forced to close on April 1.

Current Status

On May 5, the last day of the Connecticut Legislative Session, the General Assembly passed a [budget bill](#) that includes adequate funding in the Judicial Branch's "Other Expenses" account to ensure that the Bridgeport, Hartford and Litchfield courthouse law libraries remain open. Pending lease renegotiations with the owner of the Willimantic Juvenile Courthouse, the Willimantic law library may reopen. Unfortunately, the Milford and Norwich libraries will remain closed.

In addition to providing adequate funding to keep the law libraries open, the new budget bill reforms the process by which the Judicial Branch's budget is adopted:

- It provides the Legislature with additional opportunities to see the Judicial Branch's budget recommendations by requiring that the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) include the Judicial Branch's proposed budget in the Governor's budget.
- It requires that OPM allot the exact amount of funding that is included in the approved state budget minus the specific amount of mandatory lapses included in the budget.
- It gives the Legislature the ability to reject budget cuts made by the Executive Branch to the Judicial Branch's budget after it is adopted.

Thanks to the support of the many SNELLA and AALL members who signed our petitions and helped spread the word, the state and local bar associations who helped us in our efforts to save the libraries, and other allies who spoke out about the need to keep the law libraries open, Connecticut's judges, lawyers and members of the public will continue to be able to visit the Bridgeport, Hartford and Litchfield courthouse law libraries to access the legal resources they need.

We will keep this Case Study updated as we learn more about the status of the Willimantic courthouse law library.