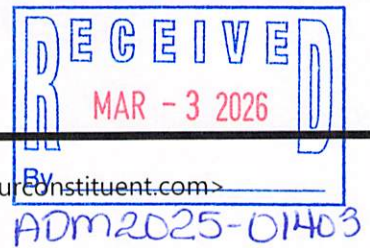


**Kim Meador**



**From:** Sherhunda Gentry <Sherhunda.Gentry.1402610341@yourconstituent.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 3, 2026 3:05 PM  
**To:** appellatecourtclerk  
**Subject:** Expand Legal Help in Tennessee: Comments on No. ADM2025-01403

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Dear Clerk Hivner and Honorable Justices of the Tennessee Supreme Court,

I am writing in response to the Court's request for comments on the regulation of the legal profession and Tennessee's access-to-justice crisis. Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue.

Across our state, people struggle to access the legal assistance they need; lawyers are too expensive for most people, and many counties are classified as legal deserts because there just aren't enough lawyers to go around. I strongly endorse the Courts suggestion that people without law degrees could deliver legal services and support authorizing legal helpers to assist with basic civil legal needs. This is a smart, compassionate, and practical way to make justice more accessible.

I am writing to formally request the allocation of federal funding to support the establishment of salaried, non-attorney legal representative positions within the Memphis community. This request is driven by a critical gap in our local support system that prevents individuals with severe health issues from accessing the federal disability benefits they are entitled to.

#### Professional Background and Expertise

With a decade of specialized experience in Social Security Disability, I have seen firsthand the complexities of the application process. My background includes: Legal Assistant (6 years): Working within a high-volume Memphis attorneys office, managing medical record development and case files. Disability Advocate (4 years): Directly assisting individuals through every stage of the process, including Initial Claims, Reconsiderations, and Hearings. I have a proven track record of drafting comprehensive hearing briefs for Administrative Law Judges (ALJs), which frequently result in "On-the-Record" approvals, saving the government the time and expense of a formal hearing.

#### The Current Challenge

In Memphis, many individuals are involuntarily unable to work due to chronic, mental illness or severe accidents. Currently, the system for representation is flawed for the most vulnerable: Financial Barriers for Advocates: The requirement to travel to Baltimore, Maryland, for testing and the associated lodging costs are significant hurdles for non-attorney representatives. Inconsistent Compensation: Relying on a contingency fee paid by the claimant is often unsustainable. It is difficult for low-income claimants to manage these payments, and advocates often face challenges in receiving funds even after a successful approval. The Representation Gap: Because of these financial risks, many private firms decline cases for

the very individuals who need help most, those with high barriers to stability.

#### Proposed Solution: The Salaried Advocate Model

I am proposing that federal funds be released to a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, specifically one aligned with workforce development and basic necessity needs, to fund a salaried Disability Advocate position. This model offers several advantages: **Early Intervention:** Providing expert assistance at the Initial Claim and Reconsideration levels reduces the massive backlog at the Hearing level. **Equity of Access:** By providing a salaried expert, we ensure that a claimants ability to navigate the system is not dependent on their ability to pay a fee. **Systemic Efficiency:** Professionalizing the initial application process ensures that the Social Security Administration receives fully developed, accurate files from day one.

#### Closing

The need for this service in Memphis is severe. Transitioning disability advocacy from a fee-contingent model to a community-based, salaried model will provide the "grit" and technical expertise required to bridge the gap between medical necessity and financial stability. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can implement this pilot program to better serve our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this vital request.