

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 29, 2017

The Honorable John Culberson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
H-310, The Capitol
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable José Serrano
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Serrano:

As you consider programs that deserve funding, we respectfully request continued funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations bill.

LSC helps military families, homeowners and renters, families with children, farmers, the disabled, the elderly and many others across the country, including nearly 112,000 veterans and their families. Over 60 million Americans, or 21% of the U.S. population, currently qualify for legal assistance from LSC funded programs. LSC-funded legal aid programs help constituents who live in households with annual incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines – in 2017, \$15,075 for an individual and \$30,750 for a family of four. Eligible constituents span every demographic and live in rural, suburban, and urban areas.

According to a 2009 study commissioned by LSC's Board of Directors, "Documenting the Justice Gap in America," many LSC grantees turn away half of the people who qualify and seek civil legal assistance due to the lack of resources. State studies consistently show that only 20% of the civil legal needs of the eligible population are being met.

Investment in civil legal aid is one of the most effective ways to help Americans navigate the justice system. The modest federal contribution to civil legal aid – only 38% of total funding for LSC-supported legal aid programs, and only 25% of all legal aid funding in the United States – is an important investment, allowing millions of Americans to safeguard their basic legal rights at minimal cost.

The Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) of the state Supreme Courts, a non-partisan organization comprised of the Chief Justices and Judges of every state has been a strong advocate of funding for LSC. The CCJ issued a policy paper showing that the large number of unrepresented citizens overwhelming state courts has negative consequences on the effective and efficient operation of the courts. The paper concludes that adequate funding for LSC is necessary to better meet the demand for legal services and to ensure access to justice for all.

LSC provides basic field funding, which supports essential client constituent services in every congressional district. A reduction in LSC's funding level for FY 18 would result in many more otherwise qualified people being turned away from civil legal assistance organizations. This would result in hundreds of thousands of fewer citizens being served by LSC nationwide, and would reduce access to the judicial system proportionately.

Congress established LSC to operate as a private, nonprofit corporation to promote equal access to justice and to provide grants for high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income persons and families. LSC distributes more than 90% of its total funding to 133 independent nonprofit legal aid programs that provide legal assistance to low-income individuals and families in every congressional district. Programs that receive LSC grants help the most vulnerable, such as military veterans seeking disability benefits, families facing unlawful evictions or foreclosures, and women seeking protection from abuse.

We hope you will do everything possible to ensure that the Legal Services Corporation receives funding in the FY 2018 CJS Appropriations bill to ensure that critical legal assistance will be provided to those in urgent need.

Sincerely,

Steve Cohen

Brian K. Fitzpatrick

John L. Mangan

Susan M. Brooks

So Kim

Joe Joe

Rosa L. DeLauro

Patrick Meehan

Stanford D. Holroyd

Michael B. Amodeo

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Julia Speiser

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Danforth K. Davis

Heidi Jackson Lee

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John B. Larson

Kathleen Hill

Val B. Jennings

Alan Adams

Ryan Estlin

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Jeff New

Dr. Beichler

Karen Baza

Thomas R. Guzzi

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