

March 23, 2017

Chairman Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
2306 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Thad Cochran
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman John Culberson
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,
& Related Agencies
2161 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Richard Shelby
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,
& Related Agencies
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Congressional Leaders:

As deans of law schools in the United States, we urge you to maintain funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the largest funder of civil legal aid in our nation. The LSC has long received bipartisan support, and we hope that you will continue to work together to ensure that the LSC has the funding it needs to perform its critical function.

We lead a diverse array of law schools – large and small, public and private, in college towns and big cities, in red states and blue states – that have a wide variety of institutional missions. Our personal views span the political spectrum. What brings us together today is a shared conviction that the loss of LSC funds would devastate efforts to provide access to essential legal services in our communities.

LSC-funded providers serve millions of low-income Americans who could not otherwise afford legal representation. These providers help people who live in households with annual incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines, a category that includes almost one in five Americans. The cases involve some of the most difficult, life-changing circumstances a person can face. The most common LSC-funded matters include advocating for the needs of military families, protecting domestic violence victims, representing parties in guardianship proceedings, preventing foreclosures, and guarding the elderly against unscrupulous lenders.

LSC funding, even at current levels, leaves many people without any legal assistance. Though LSC funds helped nearly 1.9 million people in 2015, recent studies estimate that 80 percent of the civil legal needs of the eligible population are still not being met. From 2007 to 2016, funding per eligible person decreased from \$7.54 to \$5.85.

Research shows that civil legal aid is a wise public investment and actually saves taxpayer dollars. For example, by helping end cycles of domestic violence, making it possible for children to leave foster care more quickly, and reducing unnecessary evictions and unjust foreclosures, LSC funds reduce the need for public spending in other areas.

As law school deans, we see the impact of LSC funds, not just in direct service by legal aid organizations, but through the partnerships that the funds facilitate. Many of our schools operate clinics and externships that collaborate with organizations that rely on LSC funds. The funds have a positive ripple effect across our communities and into future generations of attorneys, as our students work alongside experienced attorneys dedicated to serving the less fortunate.

LSC has been a success story because it reflects a bipartisan affirmation of who we are as Americans. As the late Justice Antonin Scalia stated in his remarks celebrating the organization's 40th anniversary, the LSC "pursues the most fundamental of American ideals," for "without access to quality representation there is no justice."

We appreciate your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

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