



## Washington State Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee

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Jennifer Greenlee, Chair (Seattle)  
Hon. Ellen Clark (Spokane County Sup. Ct.)  
Hon. Michael Spearman (Ct. of App., Div. 1)  
Hon. Greg Tripp (Spokane County Dist. Ct.)  
Rep. Drew Stokesbary (R-31)  
Rep. Laurie Jenkins (D-28)  
Sen. Ann Rivers (R-18)  
Sen. Jamie Pedersen (D-43)  
Martin Bohl (Olympia)  
Taylor Wonhoff (Office of the Governor)

### RESOLUTION 2017-01

#### In Support of the Federal Legal Services Corporation

WHEREAS, equal justice and the fair administration of justice are cornerstones of our democracy and core functions of our national and state governments and the Preamble to our national Constitution declares it to be an express purpose of the federal government "to establish justice;" and we as a nation daily pledge ourselves to a nation dedicated to "liberty *and justice* for all"; and

WHEREAS, as a nation grounded in the democratic rule of law, equal justice and the fair administration of justice are core governmental functions that have long transcended partisan difference, with all Americans standing together in common commitment to these ideals; and that at times of fiscal crisis, it is necessary that government focus on its core functions, including its essential duty to ensure fair and impartial justice for all; and

WHEREAS, for more than four decades a succession of United States Congresses and Presidents have looked to the federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC) as the keystone in federal policy designed to ensure meaningful access to civil justice for low-income people facing important civil legal problems; and

WHEREAS, bipartisan congressional action in the late 1990s formed the foundation of an enduring national consensus regarding the focus and value of the work underwritten by the federal Legal Services Corporation and ensured that the work of federally funded legal aid providers is focused on the individual needs of low-income people facing the most significant civil legal problems that affect basic human needs such as family preservation, safety and economic security; protection of housing and other essential property rights; and ensuring governmental accountability in disputes involving essential benefits and services to which low income people have a legal claim of entitlement; and

WHEREAS, ensuring equal justice is a joint federal and state responsibility, and that here in Washington State a bipartisan majority in our Legislature have consistently supported funding for civil legal aid; that the Washington State Legislature appropriates more than \$11.6 million per year for essential civil legal aid services and support (nearly double the current federal investment); that Washington State's investment is predicated on a vital and enduring federal commitment to the civil legal aid delivery infrastructure established and maintained with funding from the Legal Services Corporation, especially its support for the LSC's grantee, Northwest Justice Project; and that reduction and/or withdrawal of federal funding would fundamentally undermine the vitality and effectiveness of our state-based legal aid delivery system; and

WHEREAS, the [2015 Civil Legal Needs Study](#) published by the Washington State Supreme Court documented that 70% of low-income households experience at least one important civil legal problem each year; that those who experienced one such problem average in excess of nine often interrelated problems; that no legal help is available for more than three quarters of problems experienced; and that fully two-thirds of low-income respondents do not have trust or confidence that the civil justice system or the courts could help people like them solve important civil legal problems; and

WHEREAS, with the longstanding encouragement of the Congress, the civil legal aid system in every state has become a model public-private partnership; and that federal funding leverages hundreds of millions of dollars of private volunteer legal aid services every year (including more than \$16 million/year here in Washington State); and

WHEREAS, the President of the United States has issued a [budget blueprint](#) for FFY 2018 that calls for the elimination of the Legal Services Corporation and the zeroing out of federal support for civil legal aid; and

WHEREAS, elimination of LSC and federal financial support for civil legal aid will result in a \$6.5 million reduction in annual support for the Northwest Justice Project which will, in turn, result in the systemic denial of access to justice for thousands of low-income individuals and families each year, the closure of legal aid offices throughout the state and a corresponding loss of volunteer legal services due to the lack of support and coordination provided by LSC-funded legal aid lawyers; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee is a bipartisan body established by the Washington State Legislature to oversee the state's investment in civil legal aid service delivery through the Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid; that the Oversight Committee includes members appointed by both the Republican and Democratic caucuses in Washington State House of Representatives and Senate as well as members appointed by our Supreme Court and other judicial branch entities; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Washington State Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee unanimously requests that all members of our state's congressional delegation oppose the administration's proposal to eliminate the Legal Services Corporation, and to support funding of the Corporation at the level necessary to provide critically needed services to low-income Americans, including those here in Washington State.

Adopted this 3rd day of April, 2017

  
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Jennifer A. Greenlee, Chair