

The Supreme Court
State of Washington

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March 29, 2017

Honorable Patty Murray
Honorable Maria Cantwell
Honorable Suzan DelBene
Honorable Rick Larsen
Honorable Jaime Herrera Beutler
Honorable Dan Newhouse
Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Honorable Derek Kilmer
Honorable Pramila Jayapal
Honorable Dave Reichert
Honorable Adam Smith
Honorable Denny Heck

SENT VIA E-MAIL
AND U.S. MAIL

Re: Legal Services Corporation

Dear Members of the Washington State Congressional Delegation:

As chief justice of the nine member Washington State Supreme Court and as the co-chair of the Washington State Board for Judicial Administration representing all levels of the Washington judiciary, I write on our behalf to ask that you protect funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) at or as close to current levels as possible and that you reject the administration's proposal to eliminate the LSC.

The first purpose of our federal constitution is "to establish justice." For 43 years, LSC has been the vehicle through which Congress has worked to ensure justice and fairness for low-income individuals and families faced with civil legal problems that affect their physical safety, housing, access to critically needed services, economic security, health care, and other basic human needs. As required by statute, LSC underwrites the provision of effective and economical services that respond to the most important day-to-day legal problems experienced by low-income Americans.

Over the past three decades, Supreme Court justices and the court itself have recognized the central importance of civil legal aid and the need to ensure access to the justice system for those who cannot afford to get legal help. Highlights of our involvement include the establishment of the Washington State Access to Justice Board in 1994, the very first access to justice commission in the country; appointment in 2001 of a Task Force on Civil Equal Justice Funding which published the

very first comprehensive Civil Legal Needs Study in our state in 2003; passage of numerous resolutions in support of civil legal aid by our Board for Judicial Administration; regular support for efforts to expand state funding for civil legal aid; and, most recently in 2015, publication of a comprehensive update to our first Civil Legal Needs Study. This latter study, a copy of which is enclosed with this letter, documents how very deep the justice gap is in our state and the troubling consequences it presents. The findings tell us that now is not the time to walk away from our investment in civil legal aid; it is the time to increase it.


With strong bipartisan support over many years, the Washington State Legislature has built upon the LSC-funded foundation, appropriating nearly twice as much (\$12 million) as we receive in funding from LSC (\$6.5 million) each year. This federal-state partnership helps ensure access to justice and fundamental fairness for the more than 2 million Washingtonians (more than 20 percent of our state) living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

LSC funding supports the core legal aid delivery infrastructure into which the state of Washington invests and on which it expands. Without this funding, our state legal aid will suffer crippling cuts to the services it provides. Specifically, our statewide legal aid provider, Northwest Justice Project, will be forced to close offices in many rural and remote parts of the state, significantly curtail access to the statewide legal aid call center (CLEAR) which serves thousands of people from all over the state each year, and reduce its financial and professional support for the 17 stand-alone local volunteer legal aid programs throughout Washington who, together, leverage more than 60,000 hours of volunteer legal services valued at \$16.5 million per year (at \$275/hour). And, most importantly, if LSC is eliminated, thousands of Washingtonians will be unable to access services to help them address their critical—and often life changing—civil legal issues.

Alexander Hamilton advised that “the first duty of society is justice.” LSC funds ensure that justice is available for the homeless veteran denied VA benefits, for the victim of domestic violence needing shelter and legal protection for herself and her children, for the disabled senior being denied necessary home health care services, for vulnerable people who fall victim to predatory consumer scams, and for so many others for whom the law offers protection but who lack a legal voice to enforce the same. In a society committed to fairness and the just rule of law, all must have access to and the ability to enforce our rights within the civil justice system.

Thank you for your consideration of these thoughts and for your support for the LSC.

Very truly yours,



MARY E. FAIRHURST
Chief Justice and Co-Chair for
the Board for Judicial Administration