

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Committee
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chair
Judiciary Committee
United States House of Representatives
2132 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry C. Johnson
Chair
Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual
Property, and the Internet
United States House of Representatives
2240 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

February 3, 2021

Re: Funding for the Legal Services Corporation

Dear Senator Murray, Representative Nadler and Representative Johnson:

As leaders of more than 165 U.S. law firms with offices across the United States, we encourage you to support the request from the Legal Services Corporation (“LSC”) for a significant supplemental appropriation to enable LSC to address the short and long-term consequences of the pandemic on low-income Americans. We request that you include funding for LSC in your request to the Budget Committee as they draft a resolution to enable President Biden’s \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan to move forward.

For more than four decades, members of both parties in Congress have recognized the value of funding LSC, which provides grants to local legal aid organizations covering every county in all 50 states. LSC’s grants are spent only by these community-based organizations, which supplement the funds with local fundraising, to provide critical civil legal services to low-income individuals, like veterans seeking benefits, women fleeing domestic violence, and families struggling to stay in their homes. LSC’s local grantees follow the Congressional mandate to focus their resources on these vulnerable individuals in our communities; they are precluded by law from using this money to, among other things, represent prisoners, file class actions, and litigate re-districting actions.

The pandemic has vastly increased the legal needs of the most vulnerable members of our communities. For instance, LSC estimates that more than 5.13 million U.S. households who qualify for LSC-funded services, are at risk of eviction. We are familiar with the great need because our firms have been providing pro bono legal services to those most impacted by COVID.

The local legal aid organizations funded by LSC are critical to our firms and our communities. The lawyers at our firms work directly with these community legal aid organizations, partnering with them to provide millions of hours of free legal services each year. Our ability to provide these pro bono legal services – for instance, to prevent the wrongful eviction of a family – is directly dependent on partnership with LSC-funded legal aid organizations, which screen cases for merit and eligibility and train and mentor our attorneys. Increased LSC funding will not only allow civil legal aid organizations to serve Americans hit by the pandemic and its economic fallout, but will increase the

capacity of the private bar to help these individuals. The pro bono activity facilitated by LSC funding is exactly the kind of public-private partnership the government should encourage.

It is also important to understand that LSC funds local legal aid organizations in rural areas that most law firms have difficulty serving because of our lawyers' geographic locations and/or bar memberships. In many rural counties across our nation, the local legal aid organizations funded by LSC are the only available help for low-income Americans.

LSC funding is money well spent in our local communities. State studies have shown that the problems solved by legal aid offer a strong return on investment. For instance, in Florida in 2016, civil legal services saved \$60.4 million, including emergency shelter and foreclosure costs. In Tennessee in 2015, civil legal aid saved \$1.3 million on emergency shelters; \$7.5 million in costs to domestic violence survivors, including medical and mental health expenses; and \$33.8 million in foreclosure costs for residents and local governments. In Virginia in 2015, civil legal aid spending saved \$1.2 million in emergency shelter costs and \$1.9 million in healthcare and other expenses related to domestic violence. Other state surveys, from Pennsylvania and Iowa for instance, have shown that every dollar spent on legal aid has up to an eleven-fold local economic impact.

Our local communities depend on the legal aid organizations funded by LSC, and our firms, in turn, rely on these legal aid agencies to increase the impact of our volunteer legal services. We are all a part of our country's recovery from the pandemic. That is why our firms, as well as our individual lawyers, give generously to LSC grantees. We ask that Congress support this supplemental funding request and continuing its bi-partisan support of civil legal aid for our communities.

Sincerely,

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cc: The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Chair, Judiciary Committee, United States Senate

The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Chair, Budget Committee, United States Senate

The Honorable Jean Shaheen, Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, United States Senate

The Honorable Matt Cartwright, Vice-Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies, United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair, Appropriations Committee, United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mary Gay Scanlon, Vice Chair, Judiciary Committee, United States House of Representatives

The Honorable John Yarmuth, Chair, Budget Committee, United States House of Representatives

