

May 10, 2021

Re: Fully Fund The Legal Services Corporation

To All Members of Congress:

As leaders of more than 160 U.S. law firms with offices in all fifty states and the District of Columbia, we encourage you to maintain your support for funding the Legal Services Corporation (“LSC”). Given the impact of the pandemic on lower-income Americans, we respectfully ask that you support a substantial increase in LSC’s requested appropriation for FY 2022.

For more than four decades, Congress has acted on a bi-partisan basis to fund LSC, which then provides grants to local legal aid organizations covering every county in all 50 states. LSC distributes nearly 94% of its federal appropriation to these nonprofit organizations delivering civil legal aid to local communities. These community-based organizations then supplement LSC-allocated funds with local fundraising to provide critical legal services to low-income individuals, like veterans seeking benefits, women fleeing domestic violence, survivors of natural disasters, 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.

LSC did not receive requested funding in the \$1.9 trillion American Recovery Act. Yet, 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 collectively provide millions of hours of free legal services each year to individuals in desperate need of assistance. Our ability to provide these pro bono legal services 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 in need, including those hit by the pandemic and its economic fallout, but will increase the private bar’s capacity to provide free help to these individuals. The pro bono activity facilitated by LSC funding is exactly the kind of public-private partnership the government should encourage.

Critically, LSC also 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 Louisiana

in 2018, providing civil legal aid saved \$63.7 million in housing, family/juvenile costs, and education, and assisting survivors of domestic violence saved \$9.5 million. In Nevada in 2018, civil legal services saved \$38 million, including foreclosure costs and costs associated with domestic violence. In Florida in 2017, civil legal services saved \$60.4 million, including emergency shelter and foreclosure costs. In Iowa in 2017, civil legal aid saved \$11.57 million in costs to domestic violence survivors, and \$3.6 million in housing matters, including evictions and foreclosures. 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. That is why our firms, as well as our individual lawyers, give generously to LSC grantees. We ask that Congress do its part by fully funding LSC and continuing its bi-partisan support of civil legal aid for our communities.

Sincerely,

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