

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 25, 2015

The Honorable John Culberson  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
H-309, The Capitol  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chaka Fattah  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Fattah:

As you consider programs that deserve funding, we respectfully request that you fund the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) at \$486.9 million in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations bill.

LSC received its largest appropriation of \$420 million in FY 2010. LSC is currently funded at \$375 million for FY 2015, an 11% decrease from FY 2010. Also, if LSC's 1995 appropriation of \$400 million were adjusted to keep pace with inflation, it would total more than \$600 million today.

More Americans are eligible for legal aid than ever in LSC's history. Over 60 million Americans, or 21 % of the U.S. population, currently qualify for legal assistance from LSC funded programs. LSC-funded legal aid programs help constituents who live in households with annual incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines – in 2014, \$14,588 for an individual and \$29,813 for a family of four. Eligible constituents span every demographic and live in rural, suburban, and urban areas. They include veterans and military families, homeowners and renters, families with children, farmers, the disabled, and the elderly.

According to a 2009 study commissioned by LSC's Board of Directors, "Documenting the Justice Gap in America," many LSC grantees turn away half of the people who qualify and seek civil legal assistance due to the lack of resources. State studies consistently show that only 20% of the civil legal needs of the eligible population are being met.

Investment in civil legal aid is one of the most effective ways to help Americans navigate the justice system and help stabilize and grow the nation's economy. The modest federal contribution to civil legal aid – only 39% of total funding for LSC-supported legal aid programs, and only 25% of all legal aid funding in the United States – is a good investment, allowing millions of Americans to safeguard their basic legal rights at minimal cost.

The Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) of the state Supreme Courts, a non-partisan organization comprised of the Chief Justices and Judges of every state has been a strong advocate of funding for LSC. The CCJ issued a policy paper showing that the large number of unrepresented citizens overwhelming state courts has negative consequences on the effective and efficient operation of the courts. The paper concludes that adequate funding for LSC is necessary to better meet the demand for legal services and to ensure access to justice for all.

Congress established LSC to operate as a private, nonprofit corporation to promote equal access to justice and to provide grants for high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income persons and families. LSC distributes more than 90% of its total funding to 134 independent nonprofit legal aid programs that provide legal assistance to low-income individuals and families in every congressional district. Programs that receive LSC grants help the most vulnerable, such as military veterans seeking disability benefits, families facing unlawful evictions or foreclosures, and women seeking protection from abuse.

We thank the committee for including \$4 million for the new Pro Bono Innovation Fund to support new projects to encourage private attorneys to engage in pro bono service and support pro bono initiatives throughout the country. We urge you to continue to fund this important innovative program to expand access to justice.

We hope you will do everything possible to ensure that the Legal Services Corporation receives full funding in the FY 2016 CJS appropriations bill. We urge you to provide \$486.9 million to fund LSC to ensure that critical legal assistance will be provided to those in urgent need.

Sincerely,

Steve Cole

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Zoe Lyr

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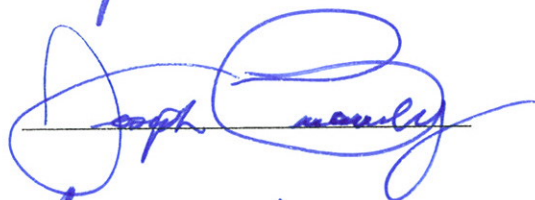


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