



THE STATE BAR OF CALIFORNIA

"To Improve the Justice System and Assure a Free and Just Society Under the Law"

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Your Help Needed to Bridge the Justice Gap

Holly Fujie
2008-2009 State Bar President

Dear Colleague:

California is a land of plenty - plenty of poor people with legal needs. The wealth of this state is balanced - or overbalanced - by families in need, veterans cut adrift, a graying population with increasing needs for support and protection, and children at risk of falling through the cracks of a system pushed to the breaking point.

Last year, for the first time, thousands of lawyers and judges across the state came together to expand legal assistance to families like these by contributing \$100 each to the new Justice Gap Fund - raising more than \$1 million. Today, the need is even greater. We hope that you will join your colleagues in supporting the Justice Gap Fund this year. The opportunity to do so is included in your State Bar fee statement and is also available online at <http://calbar.org/justicegapfund>.

Government Recognizes the Importance of Legal Aid

In 1981, the Legislature responded to the growing legal needs of low-income Californians by creating the Legal Services Trust Fund Program. This division of the State Bar administers a grant-making program that supports non-profit legal aid organizations serving all 58 counties. This initial funding source is generated through interest on lawyers' trust accounts ("IOLTA").

As economic tides turned in the 1990s and interest rates dropped, the need for legal services overwhelmed the funding available through IOLTA. In response, the Legislature created the Equal Access Fund ("EAF"), administered jointly by the Judicial Council and the State Bar. The Fund has been included in the state budget ever since, and has been augmented over the years by a share of civil filing fee receipts and modest cost-of-living increases. Today, between IOLTA and the EAF, the State Bar's Trust Fund Program is distributing more than \$30 million in grants to nearly 100 non-profit legal aid organizations serving low-income Californians.

**The Justice Gap Fund:
Making Inroads Toward Filling the Legal Need**

Seeing the seriousness of the gap between the amount of legal services available in California and the amount that Californians really need, the legislature recently authorized an additional source of support for legal services for the poor: the Justice Gap Fund. This Fund is supported by individuals like you, who care about the welfare of those who have no way to help themselves out of legal difficulties.

Under AB 2301 (2006), private, tax-deductible contributions can be made to the Justice Gap Fund as part of your annual payment of State Bar dues. Contributions can also be made online at <http://calbar.org/justicegapfund>. Last year, the Justice Gap Fund raised more than \$1 million in gifts from attorneys, judges, and other concerned individuals and corporations. Every dollar was passed on to legal services providers from San Diego to Susanville, serving communities from the L.A.'s teeming Skid Row to the farms of Watsonville to the mountainous reaches of the Trinity Alps and the Sierras.

Your Help is Needed

As you are well aware, world financial markets collapsed this fall in the wake of unprecedented mortgage defaults and nose-diving consumer confidence. Continuing repercussions include increased homelessness, poverty, and financial abuse of the elderly and others unable to defend themselves. Local legal services providers, already operating at full capacity, now must juggle to take on the new cases of those impacted by the meltdown. But just when more people are asking for more help, less funding is available to serve them. Interest rate deflation has reduced IOLTA income and the ongoing state budget challenges have made it difficult to increase the Equal Access Fund. This is why it is particularly important this year that you consider helping to bridge the Justice Gap, with a contribution to the Justice Gap Fund.

Whether you renew your State Bar membership on-line, or by mailing back the bill you receive in your mailbox, please think about making a gift to the Justice Gap Fund. There are millions of Californians in need, who will thank you from the bottom of their hearts for bringing justice and liberty within their grasp.

Sincerely



Holly J. Fujie, State Bar President