

March 28, 2008

SUPPORT FUNDING FOR THE LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

Dear Bar Colleague:

We urge you to join us in supporting increased funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). We plan to submit the letter below to the House Appropriations Committee, with copies sent to each Member of Congress. We hope to recruit state bar associations in all 50 states to sign on.

We are asking Congress to provide at least \$400 million for FY 2009 as a step toward restoring LSC's funding to help address the "justice gap" that exists in our country. Today, 50 million Americans qualify for federally funded legal assistance. However, one in every two individuals who qualify for and actually seek assistance from LSC-funded programs is denied help because of lack of resources. A crisis exists for millions of low-income individuals and families who are unable to access our legal system, especially those who suddenly qualify for legal aid as a result of natural disasters, national emergency or economic hard times.

The Administration's FY 2009 budget request of \$311 million would reduce LSC funding by \$39.5 million from the FY 2008 amount of \$350.5 million. This request is less than LSC's actual appropriation in FY 1981, which was \$321 million, and is less than half of the inflation-adjusted value of that appropriation (about \$747 million). The bipartisan LSC Board requested \$471.7 million for FY 2009 in its attempt to close the "justice gap" over the next several years.

The deadline to sign this letter is Friday, April 4, 2008. We plan to distribute this letter during ABA Day in Washington, April 15-17, 2008. For further information, please contact; Bill Weisenberg, at [wwaisenberg@ohiobar.org](mailto:wweisenberg@ohiobar.org); Allan Ramsaur, aramsaur@tnbar.org; Tom Barnett, at thomas.barnett@sdbar.net; or Julie Strandlie in the ABA Governmental Affairs Office at jstrandlie@staff.abanet.org. Please e-mail Julie to sign the letter.

Sincerely,

Allan Ramsaur,
Executive Director
Tennessee Bar Association

Thomas C. Barnett,
Executive Director,
State Bar of South Dakota

William K. Weisenberg
Assistant Executive Director
Ohio State Bar Association

April 15, 2008

The Honorable Allan Mollohan
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-309 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce
Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Mollohan and Representative Frelinghuysen:

As presidents and executive directors of State Bar associations nationwide, we respectfully request that your Subcommittee take an important step forward in closing the current justice gap in America by providing the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) with at least \$400 million in the Fiscal Year 2009 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies bill.

Thanks to your efforts and strong bipartisan support, the House-passed CJS bill provided LSC with \$377 million for FY 2008, a much-needed \$28.4 million increase over FY 2007 level of \$348.6 million. However, the end-of-the year FY 2008 consolidated appropriations act reduced LSC's funding back to \$350.5 million, a mere \$1.9 million increase. LSC would have needed a \$7.3 million increase (to \$355.9 million) just to keep up with inflation.

A significant funding increase is vital for this critical program as a step toward restoring LSC's funding to pre-1996 levels, adjusted for inflation. In FY 1995, LSC was funded at \$415 million, which would be \$576 million in today's dollars.

Today, 50 million Americans qualify for federally funded legal assistance. However, the 2005 study by LSC, "*Documenting the Justice Gap in America*," reported that one in every two individuals who qualify for and actually seek assistance from LSC-funded programs is denied help because of lack of resources. Similar state studies in recent years consistently report that despite the combined efforts of LSC-funded programs, state, local and private funding and pro bono efforts, the majority of low-income Americans are unable to obtain legal assistance that is often critical to their safety and independence.

Every day, new situations arise that continue to stretch the ability of our country to ensure that low income persons can fairly resolve their legal problems through the justice system. Today, consumer fraud matters and the mortgage foreclosure crisis are at the forefront. In addition to affecting low-income homeowners, the foreclosures are also forcing low-income renters from their homes.

LSC currently funds 137 local programs serving every county, state and Congressional District in the United States and its territories. These local programs provide direct services to approximately one million constituents who struggle to get by on incomes below or near the poverty line. The failure to resolve their basic legal issues causes even greater hardship for them, and often leads to their reliance on other government programs.

For the above reasons, we request that your support to increase LSC funding to at least \$400 million to help meet this urgent need. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Robert F. Ware, President
Ohio State Bar Association

Marcia M. Eason, President
Tennessee Bar Association

Richard L. Travis, President
State Bar of South Dakota