

February 15, 2017

Legislative Building
416 Sid Snyder Ave SW
Olympia, Washington 98501

Re: Civil Legal Aid Funding

Dear Legislative Leaders and Budget Writers,

We are writing on behalf of fifteen of the leading companies in Washington State to urge you to increase funding for civil legal aid by \$12.012 million for the fiscal year 2017-19 biennium. This would fund the Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan submitted by the Office of Civil Legal Aid in an effort to bring our state in line with the federal minimum standard for civil legal aid. Our companies depend on the legal system to ensure that contracts will be honored and property rights upheld so that our companies can invest in their futures with confidence. Access to the legal system is equally important to all of us as individuals. In Washington, as in other states, access to work, to housing, to social benefits and other life essentials is mediated by our legal system. But when faced with a potentially unlawful job termination, a housing eviction, or a denial of benefits, many Washingtonians cannot afford a lawyer and do not know where to turn for help.

We are deeply troubled by the findings of the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study Update, developed at the direction of the state Supreme Court. The study shows that nearly three-quarters of low-income households experience at least one important civil legal problem each year, and that one legal problem often leads to another, making the need for legal assistance all the more acute. Unfortunately, most of the time people get no legal help whatsoever when facing these challenges, which can be life altering. This is a big problem because well over one million Washingtonians are unlikely to be able to afford a lawyer. Unfortunately, we are moving backwards in addressing this challenge: funding from all sources for civil legal aid has declined on a per capita basis by nearly 14% since the year 2000. As a result, nearly two-thirds of low-income people have little or no confidence in the capacity of the justice system to help people like them solve important legal problems affecting their most basic needs like personal and family safety, economic security, housing, health and education.

Our society is grounded on the fair administration of justice under the rule of law. We believe it is unacceptable that so many of our fellow Washingtonians feel effectively shut out of our justice system.

We therefore ask that you take action this session to fully fund the Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan submitted by the Office of Civil Legal Aid. By doing so, you will affirm to

your most vulnerable constituents and to all the people and businesses in Washington that our state justice system is open to all.

Sincerely,



Kyle Levine
Vice President Legal and General Counsel
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Virgin America Inc.
Horizon Air Industries, Inc.



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