March 29, 2019

The Honorable Jose Serrano  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
H-310, The Capitol  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Chairman Serrano and Ranking Member Aderholt:

As you consider appropriations legislation for the coming year, we respectfully request robust funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations bill.

LSC helps military families and veterans, those affected by opioids and addiction, victims of natural disasters, domestic violence survivors, families with children, homeowners and renters, the disabled, the elderly, and many others across the country. LSC-funded legal aid programs help constituents who live in households with annual incomes at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, which in 2019, is $15,613 for an individual and $32,188 for a family of four. Today, nearly 60 million Americans, or 18.2 percent of the U.S. population, currently qualify for legal assistance from LSC-funded programs. LSC's clients span every demographic and live in rural, suburban, and urban areas, and LSC basic field funding supports essential client services in every congressional district.

In 2017, LSC released a study, "The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans," showing 86 percent of the civil legal problems of low-income Americans received inadequate or no legal help in the past year. The "justice gap" is the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs. Investment in civil legal aid is one of the most effective ways to help Americans navigate the justice system. Funding for legal aid promotes individual empowerment and self-reliance by giving people the tools and knowledge to access the civil court system to protect and exercise their rights.

At the 40th anniversary celebration of the establishment of LSC, late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia remarked, "Equal treatment is the element of justice most fundamental...denial of access to professional legal assistance is denial of equal justice." This sentiment has been echoed by business leaders, private law firms, state attorneys general, and Chief Justices of state courts who have advocated their support for robust funding for LSC.
LSC provides basic field funding, which supports essential client constituent services in every congressional district. A reduction in LSC’s funding level for FY20 would result in many more otherwise qualified people being turned away from civil legal assistance organizations. This would result in hundreds of thousands of fewer citizens being served by LSC nationwide, and would reduce access to the judicial system proportionately.

Congress enshrined these principles when it 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 94 percent of its total funding to 132 independent nonprofit legal aid programs.

We hope you will do everything possible to ensure that the Legal Services Corporation receives robust funding in the FY 2020 CJS Appropriations bill to ensure that critical legal assistance will be available to those in urgent need.

Sincerely,

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

Susan W. Brooks
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Fred Upton
Member of Congress

Mary Gay Scanlon
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Blaine Laetkenmeyer  
Member of Congress

Ann Wagner  
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Alex X. Mooney  
Member of Congress
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Michael McCauley
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