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Tony Mestres
CEO, Seattle Foundation
1600 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1900
Seattle, WA 98101

Dear Tony,

April 10, 2020

Civil legal aid is a lifeline in a time of crisis, and a crisis of unprecedented magnitude has arrived in every community in our nation. COVID-19 has not only put pressure on healthcare facilities across the country, but it has also created a rash of new civil legal problems that are testing the resiliency of legal aid providers nationwide. Across the country, we are beginning to see the ramifications of the pandemic in the massive growth of unemployment rates with families suddenly unable to afford rent payments or healthcare. In the midst of this crisis, people need help to fight unfair evictions, get domestic violence protective orders, obtain unemployment benefits, and access healthcare. Civil legal aid providers are the **first responders** for families who need legal assistance.

We ask the Seattle Foundation to consider making a significant investment in the safety net we have in place for low income people for whom legal aid can make a life-changing difference.

Background:

The Legal Foundation of Washington was created by the Washington Supreme Court in 1984 to harness the power of the legal profession to meet the basic needs of low income people facing critical civil legal issues. We are a grant making organization. We provide funding to 30 nonprofit organizations around the state, who in turn make basic legal services available to low-income people who face legal challenges that are made worse by poverty. Our grants often constitute the majority of a provider's budget, in some cases covering over 80% of their general operating costs. In 2020, the Foundation made \$10 Million in annual grants to more than 30 legal aid providers. LFW is the backbone of a network that includes the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, TeamChild, The King County Bar Association, Eastside Legal Assistance Program and Columbia Legal Services. **In King County alone, LFW funds 12 legal aid organizations which served 14,000 clients in 2019.**

The New Reality:

Washington's legal aid providers are facing an unprecedented deluge as our state's low-income populations take the brunt of the faltering economy and skyrocketing unemployment numbers. The closure of businesses for social distancing has not only increased the number of people with legal problems, but has also increased the number of people who qualify as low-income and thus for civil legal aid. The Legal Foundation of Washington is in a unique position to help maintain stability in this emergency. Their robust grant making infrastructure allows them to receive and deploy funds quickly and efficiently, and disperse them into the community where they are needed most.

Our grantees are working on the following issues related to COVID-19:

- **Accessing Unemployment Benefits:**

Long-time grantee [Unemployment Law Project](#) has seen a 150% increase in calls from people who need help accessing unemployment benefits since March 15th. LFW partnered with a federally funded legal aid provider, the Northwest Justice Project, and the office of Civil Legal Aid to provide them with an emergency grant to hire more staff and attorneys to respond to the increase in need.

- **Freezing Evictions:**

The King County Bar Association's [Housing Justice Project](#) (HJP) worked to enact the [statewide moratorium on evictions](#) during this crisis, after advocating for the City of Seattle's [60-day freeze](#). [As detailed in the Seattle Times](#), HJP attorneys continued to represent renters facing eviction while pushing for systemic action.

- **Protecting Domestic Violence Survivors**

Survivors of domestic violence are particularly vulnerable during the statewide stay-at-home order, experiencing more isolation and less access to resources and social connections. LFW Grantee, [Eastside Legal Assistance Program's](#) (ELAP) Domestic Violence Legal Program, which serves domestic violence survivors throughout King County, is moving swiftly to ensure people can still access critical legal help.

As legal aid providers respond to the existing needs of low-income populations and increase their efforts to offer immediate relief to those who have been the most impacted by the pandemic, stable funding becomes even more vital. **Now** is the time to invest in civil legal aid to ensure that our communities can heal not only from the illness that is threatening them, but also the long-term economic and legal issues that are beginning to surface.

We are fortunate to have the support of community and legal leaders Paula Boggs, Lucy Helm and Steve DeForest among others who can speak to the power of legal aid. We welcome the opportunity to talk with you about the importance of considering legal aid as a remedy in this crisis and in your grant making. And we want to thank you for everything the Seattle Foundation is doing to help those in need in our community – the Foundation has become a vital asset and is needed now more than ever.

With wishes for your good health,



Caitlin Davis
Executive Director, LFW



Melinda Mann
Chief Development & Stewardship Officer



2020 Partnership Grants

Benefits Law Center
Benton Franklin Legal Aid
Blue Mountain Action Council
Chelan-Douglas County Volunteer Attorney Services
Clallam-Jefferson County Pro Bono Lawyers
Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program
Columbia Legal Services
Cowlitz Wahkiakum Legal Aid
Eastside Legal Assistance Program
King County Bar Foundation
Kitsap Legal Services
LAW Advocates
Legal Counsel for Youth and Children
Northwest Immigrant Rights
Skagit Volunteer Lawyer Program
Snohomish County Legal Services
Solid Ground
Spokane County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Program
TacomaProBono
TeamChild
Thurston County Volunteer Legal Services
Unemployment Law Project
Yakima County Volunteer Attorney Services

2020 Race Equity Grants

Center for Justice
Cowlitz Wahkiakum Legal Aid
Disability Rights Washington
Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima & Kittitas
Entre Hermanos & QLaw Foundation
Seattle Clemency Project
Tenants Union of Washington State
Washington Parole Coalition
West African Community Council
What's Next Washington & Freedom Project

The Endowment for Equal Justice a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered with the Washington State Charities Program.