

July 19, 2019

The Honorable José Serrano
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
H-307, 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
H-310, The Capitol
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Serrano and Moran and Ranking Members Aderholt and Shaheen:

We write on behalf of aging organizations in response to the White House Fiscal Year 2020 Budget that proposes to eliminate the Legal Services Corporation (LSC).

Clients who are 60 and older represent 19% of all clients assisted by LSC grantees as of 2017. The number of senior clients has been increasing since 2014, with a 14.6% increase between 2014 and 2017. In 2017, LSC grantees assisted an estimated 140,000 seniors with legal issues. Approximately 76% of programs receiving Older Americans Act legal services funds are primarily funded by LSC, so the ability of these programs to serve seniors heavily hinges on LSC funding.

The federal government has a constitutional role in ensuring “justice for all.” Our rule of law breaks down when indigent and aging people are unable to obtain justice.

Courts report that the large number of unrepresented citizens overwhelming the nation's courts has negative consequences not only for them, but also for the effectiveness and efficiency of courts striving to serve older Americans and other segments of the community seeking dispute resolution. Equal justice under the law means nothing if competent representation before the law is lacking.

Day in and day out, legal aid attorneys secure the rights of older Americans unable to secure their rights for themselves. Legal aid attorneys secure clients’ rights through federal, state, and local law—not exclusively state and local law.

Funding for equal justice under *federal* law is a federal duty, not to be transferred as an unfunded mandate to state and local governments. In short, the federal government must pay its fair share.

Federal funding for LSC is down 18% since inflation-adjusted Fiscal Year 2010. Furthermore, LSC funding is down 43% from the average inflation-adjusted funding level of the 1980s.

In conclusion, we affirm the importance of robust and restored federal funding for the Legal Services Corporation, lest “equal justice under law” be compromised for our nation’s older Americans.

Sincerely,

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