

March 14, 2018

Chairman Rodney P. Frelinghuysen  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
2306 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Nita Lowey  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
2365 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman John Culberson  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,  
& Related Agencies  
2161 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Jose Serrano  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,  
& Related Agencies  
2227 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Thad Cochran  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Patrick Leahy  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
437 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Richard Shelby  
U.S. Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,  
& Related Agencies  
304 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Jeanne Shaheen  
U.S. Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,  
& Related Agencies  
506 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Congressional Leaders:

As deans of law schools in the United States, we urge you to at least maintain – if not increase – funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the largest funder of civil legal aid in our nation. The LSC has long received bipartisan support, and we hope that you will continue to work together to ensure that the LSC has the funding it needs to perform its critical function.

We lead a diverse array of law schools – large and small, public and private, in college towns and big cities, in red states and blue states – that have a wide variety of institutional missions. Our personal views span the political spectrum. What brings us together today is a shared conviction that the loss of LSC funds would devastate efforts to provide access to essential legal services in our communities.

LSC-funded providers serve millions of low-income Americans who could not otherwise afford legal representation. These providers help people who live in households with annual incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines, a category that includes almost one in five Americans. The cases involve some of the most difficult, life-changing circumstances a person can face. The most common LSC-funded matters include advocating for the needs of military families, protecting domestic violence victims, representing parties in guardianship proceedings, ensuring safe and affordable housing, and protecting Americans, especially the elderly, against unfair (and even fraudulent) lending practices.

LSC funding, even at current levels, leaves many people without any legal assistance. Though LSC funds helped nearly 1.89 million people in 2016, a new study released by LSC last year found that 86 percent of the civil legal needs of the eligible population are not being met. From 2008 to 2017, funding per eligible person decreased from \$7.25 to \$6.06.

Research shows that civil legal aid is a wise public investment and actually saves taxpayer dollars. For example, by helping end cycles of domestic violence, making it possible for children to leave foster care more quickly, and reducing unnecessary evictions and unjust foreclosures, LSC funds reduce the need for public spending in other areas.

As law school deans, we see the impact of LSC funds, not just in direct service by legal aid organizations, but through the partnerships that the funds facilitate. Many of our schools operate clinics and externships that collaborate with organizations that rely on LSC funds. The funds have a positive ripple effect across our communities and into future generations of attorneys, as our students work alongside experienced attorneys dedicated to serving the less fortunate.

LSC has been a success story because it reflects a bipartisan affirmation of who we are as Americans. As the late Justice Antonin Scalia stated in his remarks celebrating the organization's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the LSC "pursues the most fundamental of American ideals," for "without access to quality representation there is no justice."

We appreciate your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Andy Abrams  
Charleston Law School

Mark L. Adams  
University of Idaho College of Law

Robert W. Adler  
University of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law

Gail B. Agrawal  
University of Iowa College of Law

Mark C. Alexander  
Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law

Nicholas Allard  
Brooklyn Law School

Vikram David Amar  
University of Illinois College of Law

S. James Anaya  
University of Colorado Law School

Jerry L. Anderson  
Drake University Law School

Tawia B. Ansah  
Florida International University College of Law

Daniel F. Attridge  
The Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law

D. Benjamin Barros  
University of Toledo College of Law

Christopher W. Behan  
Southern Illinois University School of Law

Jessica W. Berg  
Case Western Reserve University School of Law

Luke Bierman  
Elon University School of Law

Mary Lu Bilek  
CUNY School of Law

Craig M. Boise  
Syracuse University College of Law

Mark E. Brandon  
The University of Alabama School of Law

David A. Brennan  
University of Kentucky College of Law

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University of North Carolina School of Law

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University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law

Jennifer Gerarda Brown  
Quinnipiac University School of Law

Joan R. M. Bullock  
Thomas Jefferson School of Law

Marcilynn A. Burke  
University of Oregon School of Law

Michael T. Cahill  
Rutgers Law School

Paul L. Caron  
Pepperdine University School of Law

Megan M. Carpenter  
University of New Hampshire School of Law

Erwin Chemerinsky  
University of California, Berkeley School of Law

Ronald K. Chen  
Rutgers Law School

Kevin Cieply  
Ave Maria School of Law

Annette E. Clark  
Seattle University Law School

Jennifer M. Collins  
SMU-Dedman School of Law

Danielle M. Conway  
University of Maine School of Law

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Northern Illinois University College of Law

Cathy Cox  
Mercer University School of Law

Phyliss Craig-Taylor  
North Carolina Central University School of Law

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University of Louisville Louis D. Brandeis School of Law

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Timothy Fisher  
University of Connecticut School of Law

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Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico Law School

Royal Furgeson  
UNT Dallas College of Law

Thomas C. Galligan, Jr.  
LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center

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Yale Law School

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University of Missouri Kansas City School of Law

Alfredo Garcia  
St. Thomas University School of Law

Jon M. Garon  
Nova Southeastern University, Shepard Broad College of Law

Gary S. Gildin  
Dickinson Law, Pennsylvania State University

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Mark C. Gordon  
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

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Western New England University School of Law

Donald J. Guter  
South Texas College of Law Houston

Chris Guthrie  
Vanderbilt Law School

Andrew T. Guzman  
USC Gould School of Law

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UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Brant J. Hellwig  
Washington and Lee School of Law

Michael V. Hernandez  
Regent University School of Law

Danielle Holley-Walker  
Howard University School of Law

Rachel M. Janutis  
Capital University Law School

Garry W. Jenkins  
University of Minnesota Law School

Christian A. Johnson  
Widener University Commonwealth Law School

Jennifer J. Johnson  
Lewis and Clark Law School

Kevin R. Johnson  
UC Davis School of Law

William P. Johnson  
Saint Louis University School of Law

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Loyola University Chicago School of Law

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Gonzaga University School of Law

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IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law

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University of Washington School of Law

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Loyola University New Orleans College of Law

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Concordia University School of Law

Don LeDuc  
Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School

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University of Arkansas School of Law

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Campbell University Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law

Melanie B. Leslie  
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Gillian Lester  
Columbia Law School

Peter V. Letsou  
The University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law

David F. Levi  
Duke University School of Law



Lyrissa Lidsky  
University of Missouri School of Law

Andrea D. Lyon  
Valparaiso University School of Law

M. Elizabeth Magill  
Stanford Law School

Julio E. Fontanet Maldonado  
Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico

Gregory N. Mandel  
Temple University Beasley School of Law

John Manning  
Harvard Law School

Kevin S. Marshall  
University of La Verne College of Law

Alfred D. Mathewson  
The University of New Mexico School of Law

Stephen W. Mazza  
University of Kansas School of Law

Thomas McHenry  
Vermont Law School

David D. Meyer  
Tulane University Law School

Thomas W. Mitchell  
Texas A&M University School of Law

Eric J. Mitnick  
UMass Law School

Richard Moberly  
University of Nebraska College of Law

Trevor W. Morrison  
New York University School of Law

Jennifer L. Mnookin  
UCLA School of Law

Vivian I. Neptune  
University of Puerto Rico School of Law

Nell Newton  
Notre Dame Law School

Anthony Niedwiecki  
Golden Gate University School of Law

Jack Wade Nowlin  
Texas Tech University School of Law

Maureen A. O'Rourke  
Boston University School of Law

Hari M. Osofsky  
Penn State Law

Alicia Ouellette  
Albany Law School

Sergio Pareja  
University of New Mexico School of Law

Austen L. Parrish  
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Jeremy Paul  
Northeastern University School of Law

Eduardo M. Peñalver  
Cornell Law School

Lee Peoples  
Oklahoma City University School of Law

Wendy C. Perdue  
University of Richmond School of Law

Jennifer Rosato Perea  
DePaul University College of Law

Andrew Perlman  
Suffolk University Law School

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Florida A&M University College of Law

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John K. Pierre  
Southern University Law Center

Christopher M. Pietruszkiewicz  
Stetson University College of Law

Susan Westerberg Prager  
Southwestern Law School

A. Gail Prudenti  
Hofstra University Maurice A. Deane School of Law

Kathryn R.L. Rand  
University of North Dakota School of Law

Margaret Raymond  
University of Wisconsin Law School

Suzanne Reynolds  
Wake Forest University School of Law

L. Song Richardson  
University of California Irvine School of Law

Daniel B. Rodriguez  
Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

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Washburn University School of Law

Laura Ann Rosenbury  
University of Florida Fredric G. Levin College of Law

Vincent D. Rougeau  
Boston College Law School

Theodore W. Ruger  
University of Pennsylvania Law School

Michael P. Scharf  
Case Western Reserve University School of Law

Niels Schaumann  
California Western School of Law

Michael Hunter Schwartz  
McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific

Stephen M. Sheppard  
St. Mary's University School of Law

D. Gordon Smith  
BYU Law School

Aviam Soifer  
University of Hawaii William S. Richardson School of Law

Nancy Staudt  
Washington University School of Law

Andrew L. Strauss  
University of Dayton School of Law

Henry C. Strickland  
Samford University Cumberland School of Law

Douglas J. Sylvester  
Arizona State University Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law

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Baylor Law School

Donald B. Tobin  
University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law

John Trasviña  
University of San Francisco School of Law

Robert K. Vischer  
University of St. Thomas School of Law

Gary R. Wade  
Lincoln Memorial University Duncan School of Law

Michael Waterstone  
Loyola Law School, Los Angeles

Ronald Weich  
University of Baltimore School of Law

Mark D. West  
University of Michigan Law School

Patricia D. White  
University of Miami School of Law

Verna L. Williams  
University of Cincinnati College of Law

Penny Willrich  
Arizona Summit Law School

Melanie D. Wilson  
The University of Tennessee College of Law

David Yassky  
Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University

Michael J. Yelnosky  
Roger Williams University School of Law

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