



Dear Senators and Representatives:

We are twelve local bar associations across California, writing to urge you to reject the proposed elimination of funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Our associations are made up of attorneys from large and small corporate law firms, prosecutors, and city attorneys, among others. We are Republicans, Democrats and Independents, but what we have in common is a belief that Legal Aid plays a critical role in the justice system and in our society.

As you no doubt know, the LSC provides funding (through a carefully monitored grant and review process) to Legal Aid organizations across the country. Last year, Legal Aid organizations provided assistance to more than 1.9 million Americans, helping them with issues like obtaining a domestic violence restraining order, dealing with consumer fraud, and struggling with problems in housing conditions. They provide help to veterans in a wide variety of areas. One in five people nationwide qualifies for legal services from the organizations. There are other nonprofits that provide legal services to low-income communities – but the lions’ share of the work is done by the one organization in each region that is funded by LSC.

Without Legal Aid, homelessness, domestic violence, and poverty will increase. Not only would such increases be terrible from a moral and democratic standpoint – they would also significantly decrease the quality of life for all of us living in these communities. Further, having more people trying to represent themselves in courts will create court congestion. Dealing with litigants who are representing themselves takes much more time than dealing with cases with attorneys. Those of us representing America’s corporations and small businesses will be forced to recommend that they pay a private judge in order to get their cases heard in a timely manner.

Some have suggested that if the federal government defunds Legal Aid, private lawyers will step in and cover the gap with pro bono work. In fact, just the opposite is true. As more than 150 law firms stated in a letter to the Office of Management and Budget, “Eliminating the Legal Services Corporation will not only imperil the ability of civil legal aid organizations to serve Americans in need, it will also vastly diminish the private bar’s capacity to help these individuals.... The pro bono activity

facilitated by LSC funding is exactly the kind of public-private partnership the government should encourage, not eliminate.”

This is not a partisan issue. The LSC has long enjoyed bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate. Legal Aid is a critical part of the justice system, and if that piece is broken, the entire system will virtually cease to function. And the justice system, in turn, is one of the key elements keeping the wheels of American commerce rolling. LSC’s budget for the entire country is only \$385 million – that’s .00009% of the federal budget. Yet the \$40 million that California alone stands to lose makes all the difference.

We urge you to stand firm, and insist that the LSC budget remain uncut.

Sincerely,

Alameda County Bar Association
Alameda-Contra Costa Trial Lawyers’ Association
Bar Association of San Francisco and Justice and Diversity Center
Beverly Hills Bar Association
Contra Costa County Bar Association
Marin County Bar Association
Monterey County Bar Association
Orange County Bar Association
Santa Clara County Bar Association
San Diego County Bar Association
San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association
Ventura County Bar Association

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