

Re: Continue Bi-Partisan Support for The Legal Services Corporation for FY 2024

To All Members of Congress:

As leaders of more than 184 U.S. law firms with offices in all fifty states and the District of Columbia, we encourage you to maintain your support for the Legal Services Corporation (“LSC”) and restore its budget to the amount necessary to serve our communities. We are gravely concerned by proposals to cut LSC’s budget, which will harm vulnerable members of our communities – seniors, veterans, families, low-income homeowners – at a time when they need legal aid the most.

LSC has been a bi-partisan priority for more than four decades. Congressional appropriations to LSC are then provided by grants directly to community legal aid organizations covering every county in all 50 states. These non-profits then supplement LSC-allocated funds with local fundraising to provide critical legal services to low-income individuals, like veterans seeking benefits, women fleeing domestic violence, survivors of natural disasters, and families struggling to stay in their homes. LSC’s local grantees follow the Congressional mandate to focus their resources on these vulnerable individuals in our communities; they are precluded by law from using this money to, among other things, represent prisoners, file class actions, and litigate re-districting actions.

Congressional appropriations to LSC have been increasing in recent years, but still lag well behind historical funding. In FY 1994—28 years ago—Congress appropriated \$400 million for LSC. By FY 2022, the appropriation had increased only slightly—to \$489 million—not near enough to keep up with nearly three decades of inflation and much less the increased need for services. As a result of this underfunding, the vast majority of Americans who qualify for civil legal aid to protect their homes, their children, and their very safety still cannot access a lawyer. Cutting LSC’s budget will only further harm these vulnerable members of our communities.

As leaders of private law firms, our stake in LSC is not financial, but as a partner in providing free legal aid to our fellow Americans. The community organizations funded by LSC smartly leverage Congressional funding by recruiting lawyers at our firms to provide millions of hours of pro bono services each year. Indeed, our ability to provide pro bono legal services depends on our partnerships with LSC-funded legal aid organizations, which screen cases for merit and eligibility and train and mentor our attorneys. The pro bono activity facilitated by LSC funding is exactly the kind of public-private partnership the government should encourage.

LSC funding is money well spent in our local communities. State studies have shown that the problems solved by legal aid offer a strong return on investment, saving state and local governments millions of dollars in police, housing and other social services expenditures. For instance, in Louisiana in 2018, providing civil legal aid saved \$63.7 million in housing and family/juvenile court costs; assisting survivors of domestic violence saved \$9.5 million. In Nevada in 2018, civil legal services saved \$38 million, including foreclosure costs and costs associated with domestic violence. In Florida in 2017, civil legal services saved \$60.4 million, including emergency shelter and foreclosure costs. In Iowa in 2017, civil legal aid saved

\$11.57 million in costs to domestic violence survivors, and \$3.6 million in housing matters, including evictions and foreclosures. Other state surveys, from Pennsylvania and Iowa for instance, have shown that every dollar spent on legal aid has up to an eleven-fold local economic impact.

Our local communities depend on the legal aid organizations funded by LSC, and our firms, in turn, rely on these legal aid agencies to increase the impact of our volunteer legal services. That is why our firms, as well as our individual lawyers, give generously to LSC grantees. We ask that Congress reject any efforts to cut LSC funding, and instead continue its bi-partisan support of civil legal aid for our communities.

Sincerely,

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