



# Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

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Wade J. Henderson

June 24, 2009

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
144 Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
123 Hart Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

## Fully Fund the Legal Services Corporation and Lift the Restrictions on Legal Aid to Poor People

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

On behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition consisting of over 200 organizations, we write to urge the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee to fully fund the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) and to lift restrictions that tie LSC's hands when delivering legal aid to poor people.

Restrictions on the LSC imposed by Congress are unnecessary and have hampered LSC's ability to deliver legal services to those most vulnerable. Restrictions barring legal aid attorneys from collecting attorneys' fees, prohibiting legal services clients from participating in class action lawsuits, and limiting the use of even non-federal monies – roughly \$490 million in private and non-federal loans are tied to federal restrictions - have severely impacted the ability of the LSC to effectively and efficiently deliver legal services to individuals who most need legal assistance.

These unwarranted restrictions have caused victims of consumer fraud and illegal housing practices to be placed at a disadvantage because attorneys cannot collect fees; have postponed efforts to help prisoners reenter society; and have hamstrung the poor's ability to combat predatory lending practices, since they cannot engage in class action lawsuits. In particular, the restriction on state, local, and private funds have led to wasteful spending, as separate offices are set up to do the work that the LSC is restricted from performing. Removing these restrictions comes at no cost to the federal



government and even provides more revenue to the LSC through the collection of attorneys' fees.

For 35 years, the Legal Services Corporation has assisted the poor in civil legal cases, helping more than five million people per year. Yet due to budget cuts and restrictions imposed on the LSC in the mid-1990s, one million cases are turned away because of funding shortages every year. In these times of economic distress, when more and more people require help in battling foreclosure and eviction, securing unemployment and benefits, and dealing with medical and insurance matters, the Senate must assist those most vulnerable by funding the LSC sufficiently and by lifting no-cost restrictions.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. Please contact Lisa Bornstein, Senior Counsel at LCCR at [Bornstein@civilrights.org](mailto:Bornstein@civilrights.org) or (202) 263-2856, or Nancy Zirkin, at (202) 263-2880 or [Zirkin@civilrights.org](mailto:Zirkin@civilrights.org), with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson  
President & CEO

Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President