

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 4, 2009

The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Room H-310, The Capitol
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mollohan and Ranking Member Wolf:

As the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies prepares its appropriations bill for fiscal year ("FY") 2010, we urge you to join the effort of President Obama to remove restrictions on the Legal Services Corporation ("LSC") that are annually placed in appropriations bills.

We are concerned that laws restricting recipients of LSC funds from using state, local, and private funds for their intended purposes cause inefficiencies within the legal services community, and lessen the impact each dollar may have on providing legal assistance to those in need. In many cases, entirely separate organizations and law offices must be established to do the work that LSC-funded programs cannot do, resulting in wasted resources that would be better spent helping clients. That is why we were pleased that the President's detailed budget request proposed language that would eliminate restrictions on grantees' use of non-LSC funds.

We also support the President's proposal to lift restrictions on initiating or participating in class action lawsuits, which will enable clients to obtain the kinds of broad relief best afforded by such suits. In addition, we are pleased that the President proposed eliminating the restriction on claiming or collecting attorneys' fees in cases which permit or require such fees, which will provide more resources to LSC programs that already are stretched too thin.

Although eliminating all restrictions that have been placed in the last fifteen years on grantees of LSC funds would have a greater impact on the grantees' ability to serve low-income families and individuals, adopting the President's proposed language is a significant step that will benefit grantees of LSC funds and promote equal access to justice. Removing restrictions on the use of non-LSC funds will also significantly broaden the resource base for programs receiving LSC funds without the need for additional Federal funding.

Congress established LSC to operate as a private, nonprofit corporation to promote equal access to justice and to provide grants for high-quality civil legal

assistance to low-income persons. LSC distributes more than 95 percent of its total funding to 137 independent nonprofit legal aid programs to low-income individuals and families in every congressional district. Programs which receive LSC grants help the most vulnerable, such as families facing unlawful evictions or foreclosures, displaced persons attempting to obtain federal emergency assistance, and women seeking protection from abuse. In fact, many programs have been besieged with requests for foreclosure assistance because of the subprime mortgage crisis as well as legal assistance for delinquent child support payments and late payments on medical and car bills.

Restricting LSC grantees' use of funds hinders their ability to fulfill LSC's mission of providing equal access to justice. Therefore, we urge you to concur with the President's request and remove restrictions placed on the use of LSC and non-LSC funds.

Sincerely,

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