

How the Legal Services Restriction on State, Local, and Private Money Creates a Wasteful and Inefficient System

The Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) restriction on state, local, and private money creates a wasteful and inefficient system for delivering legal services to low-income people. In many states, justice planners have had to set up entirely separate organizations and law offices, funded by state and local public funders and private charitable sources, to do the work that LSC-funded offices cannot do, resulting in wasteful duplication of costs. Often, clients are sent back and forth between LSC and non-LSC organizations, creating confusion among clients and inefficiency within the system.

The Restriction Creates an Inefficient System in Connecticut, Often Requiring Clients to Deal With Multiple Legal Aid Organizations Before Receiving Services

The three field service programs in Connecticut use state IOLTA money to provide a broad range of client services, including some important services that would not be available if they received LSC funding. An entirely separate entity -- Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut, Inc. (SLS) -- was established with LSC funds, and uses those funds primarily to handle client telephone intake. As a result, the field programs receive client calls and refer clients to SLS; SLS screens calls, and in numerous cases, sends those same callers back to the field programs. Although the current funding structure makes this necessary, it is clearly an inefficient use of scarce funding for legal services and a hardship for prospective clients, many of whom are disabled, undereducated, or have limited proficiency in English.

The Restriction Creates Duplicate Costs in Oregon, Which Means That Certain Rural Areas of the State Do Not Have Access to Legal Services

Legal aid programs spend approximately \$300,000 each year on duplicate costs to maintain physically separate offices throughout much of Oregon. If the restriction on state and local public funds and private money were lifted, the redundant costs could be eliminated. This would result in new coverage for conventional legal services cases -- evictions, domestic violence cases, predatory lending disputes -- in underserved rural parts of the state.

The Restriction Creates Duplication And Waste in Massachusetts, Requiring Precious Funds to be Spent Unwisely

The Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) of the Boston Bar Association, an LSC-funded program, subgrants to another entity a call-in hotline for low-income residents of greater Boston, and also coordinates the work of private pro bono attorneys on cases generated by the hotline. The restriction on state and local public funds and private money, however, prevents the Project from working with many categories of immigrants. As a result, another organization has to run a separate hotline for immigrants, and still other organizations coordinate the work of pro bono attorneys on their cases. If the restrictions were eliminated on VLP's non-LSC funds, one organization could handle calls and cases for all who need help, and the reduced bureaucracy would save substantial money that could be used to help more clients in need.