

The Bar Association of San Francisco and Justice & Diversity Center Sign on to Letter in Regards to Proposed LSC Funding Cuts

May 24, 2017 -- San Francisco -- Twelve bar association in California signed on to a letter urging the rejection of President Trump's proposed cuts to Legal Services Corporation (LSC) Funding. The letter was sent to all California Senators and Representatives. The following is an excerpt from the letter:

"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

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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.”

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The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) is a nonprofit voluntary membership organization of attorneys, law students, and legal professionals in the San Francisco Bay Area. Founded in 1872, BASF enjoys the support of more than 7,300 individuals, law firms, corporate legal departments, and law schools. Through its board of directors, its committees, and its volunteer legal services programs and other community efforts, BASF has worked actively to promote and achieve equal justice for all and oppose discrimination in all its forms, including, but not limited to, discrimination based on race, sex, disability, and sexual orientation. BASF provides a collective voice for public advocacy, advances professional growth and education, and attempts to elevate the standards of integrity, honor, and respect in the practice of law.

The Justice & Diversity Center (JDC) advances fairness and equality by providing pro bono legal services to low-income people and educational programs that foster diversity in the legal profession. JDC is the largest legal services providers in San Francisco. JDC's primary purpose is the delivery of free legal services to low-income San Franciscans, as well as the non-profits that serve them. JDC delivers free legal services through its Legal Services Programs division, which consists of the Pro Bono Legal Services Program, Homeless Advocacy Project, and the Immigration Program. JDC provides enrichment programs to diverse youth and young adults through its Diversity Educational Programs. JDC's programs serve approximately 9,500 disadvantaged San Franciscans a year, with the overarching goal of assisting the community's most vulnerable members with accessing the judicial system and strengthening their personal, professional, and economic security.