

April 29, 2019

To: All Members of Congress

The undersigned 262 general counsel and corporate legal department leaders from across the country write to ask that you expand access to justice by increasing federal funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in FY2020. LSC provides grants and other essential support to civil legal aid programs in every state. Civil legal aid helps American families protect their homes and their health. It creates pathways to opportunity and stability in our schools and workplaces. It helps communities overcome serious challenges like the opioid epidemic or rebuilding after a natural disaster.

The complexity of our legal system can make it impossible to navigate without assistance, but every day people in our country are forced to face serious legal problems alone. This undermines the principle of equal justice that is at the heart of our democracy. Unresolved legal problems routinely lead to unnecessary and life-altering consequences that can be as harmful as foreclosure on a home, unfair denial of VA benefits, and even physical danger from an abusive parent or spouse.

The federal investment in civil legal aid brings our country closer to meeting its foundational promise of equal justice for all. It is also good for business. As corporate leaders, we understand that the stability of our communities directly impacts the success of our companies. LSC grantees help families gain a foothold in the middle class, strengthening our local workforces and economies by providing essential legal services to:

- active duty military personnel, as well as veterans returning from wars;
- individuals and families impacted by the opioid crisis;
- survivors of domestic violence;
- elderly individuals;
- families who are in danger of losing their homes;
- victims of natural disasters;
- families involved in child custody disputes;
- small business owners

The impact of LSC extends beyond the services its grants directly make possible. The reach of legal aid programs is significantly expanded because of their ability to build upon the foundation provided by LSC support to access additional resources, including from the private sector and businesses like ours. Corporate pro bono assistance is a valuable component of civil legal aid delivery systems, made possible by the structure and support network contributed by LSC grantees.

At the same time, LSC is uniquely positioned to identify and address disparities in access to civil legal aid. In many rural areas, and particularly in the Southern and Mountain West states, an LSC grantee is often the only source of legal help for those that cannot afford private counsel. Expanding the investment in LSC would enable it to further narrow the unequal distribution of civil legal aid that makes equal justice even less accessible to those who live outside our major cities.

Nathan Hecht, the Chief Justice of Texas, captured perfectly the value of support for LSC when he said: "Justice for only those who can afford it is neither justice *for* all nor justice *at* all." We urge Congress to strengthen its commitment to our communities, our businesses, and our fundamental values by expanding its investment in LSC.

Sincerely,

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