

**An Open Letter from the San Antonio Bar Association Board of Directors to Texas U.S. Delegation on the Elimination of Funding for the Legal Services Corporation**

The [San Antonio Bar Association](#) is deeply concerned about the Administration's call for elimination of funding for the Legal Services Corporation ("LSC") in its FY2018 budget blueprint. **LSC provides vital civil legal aid to a wide range of Americans (1.9 million annually): securing housing for veterans, freeing seniors from scams, serving rural areas when others won't, protecting battered women, and helping disaster survivors back to their feet.**

LSC represents an important service to Members' constituents; House and Senate offices across the nation routinely refer constituents to the local LSC-funded legal aid organization.

The U.S. Congress has passed hundreds of laws by which legal aid attorneys day in and day out secure the rights of individuals unable to secure their rights for themselves. Our federal government was founded on the concept of justice for all, and the federal government has a role in justice for all. Funding for equal justice under *federal* law is a federal duty, not to be transferred as an unfunded mandate to state and local governments.

The late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia assured us that all of his colleagues on the Supreme Court supported LSC. The state Supreme Court Chief Justices also have consensus support for LSC. In fact, **more than 80% of Americans believe it is important that everyone has access to civil legal help**. Also, more than 80% of people are convinced that LSC grantees' self-help centers and legal services assistance protect the vulnerable.

We know the value of LSC first-hand. Lawyers who are members of our Bar provide countless hours of *pro bono* legal services to individuals in desperate need of assistance through our Community Justice Program (CJP). This volunteer service is dependent on partnership with local legal aid organizations to which we turn clients to if we cannot assist them in their particular case. **The CJP receives 16,000+ calls annually – we refer 65% of these callers to other federally-funded legal assistance organizations including our local Texas RioGrande Legal Aid office.**

Eliminating the Legal Services Corporation will only imperil the ability of civil legal aid organizations to serve Americans in need – specifically **endangering the access to justice for more than 75,000 adults and 61,000 children annually in Texas alone.**

Moreover, LSC-funded civil legal aid is essential to individuals living in rural areas where there are few lawyers and small bar associations with limited membership. In many counties across our nation, LSC grantees are the only available help for low-income Americans.

LSC funding is money well spent. Multiple clean audits show that 93.7% of LSC's total budget is awarded in grants to 133 civil legal aid programs with nearly 900 offices nationwide. Every county has at least one LSC grantee. LSC's appropriation is quite modest; it accounts for 1/10,000th of the federal budget. Moreover, state studies have shown that the problems solved by legal aid offer a strong return on investment. For instance, a 2011 Pennsylvania Economic Impact Study by the Pennsylvania Finance and Budget Committee and the Pennsylvania IOLTA program estimated that **for each dollar spent on legal aid, \$11 of quantifiable economic outcomes and savings were realized** for all residents of

Pennsylvania. Likewise, the Florida Bar Foundation found that the return on investment was \$7 for every dollar spent. The Iowa Legal Aid Foundation estimated a six-fold return on investment; Virginia found \$5:\$1; and Tennessee found \$11:\$1.

When Congress formed LSC in 1974 (in a bi-partisan vote during the Nixon Administration), it found that "there is a need to provide high quality legal assistance to those who would be otherwise unable to afford adequate legal counsel;" and that "providing legal assistance to those who face an economic barrier to adequate legal counsel will serve best the ends of justice and assist in improving opportunities for low-income persons." That remains true today.

Our Bar Association urges that Congress continue to provide robust funding for LSC.

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*The San Antonio Bar Association (SABA) was established in 1808 to serve its members and the public with the highest degree of dedication and professionalism in the continuing pursuit of equal justice for all under law. SABA provides continuing legal educational programs for the legal community and legal outreach for the public. For more information, visit [www.sabar.org](http://www.sabar.org).*