

March 9, 2017

The Honorable John Michael Mulvaney, Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Re: Preserve The Legal Services Corporation

Director Mulvaney:

As leaders of more than 150 major U.S. law firms with offices in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, we are deeply concerned about the reported plans of the Office of Management and Budget to propose a budget eliminating funding for the Legal Services Corporation ("LSC"). LSC provides vital civil legal aid in all 50 states to a wide range of Americans: women seeking protection from domestic violence, families struggling to stay in their homes, homeless veterans seeking the benefits they earned, disaster victims needing help to recover.

We know the value of LSC first-hand. Through our lawyers, our firms provide millions of hours of free legal services to individuals in desperate need of assistance. This volunteer service is not independent of the legal aid agencies funded by the Legal Services Corporation – rather, our ability to provide pro bono legal services *is directly dependent on partnership with legal aid organizations*, which screen cases for merit and eligibility, and train and mentor our attorneys. 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.

Moreover, LSC-funded civil legal aid is essential to individuals living in rural areas that large law firms have difficulty serving because of lawyers' geographic location and/or bar membership. In many counties across our nation, LSC grantees are the only available help for low-income Americans.

And, in part because of civil legal aid's ability to leverage private bar pro bono services, LSC funding is money well spent. 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. Our firms, as well as our individual lawyers, give generously to LSC grantees because we know this is a wise investment.

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 firms have been doing our part, through our robust pro bono commitments, to ensure access to justice for low-income Americans. We need the federal government to continue to do its part, by funding LSC, so that we can continue to provide this help.

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