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April 26, 2024

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Re: State Attorneys General Support Maximum Funding for Legal Services Corporation

Dear Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Rogers, and Ranking Member Cartwright:

We write to you today as a bipartisan coalition of state attorneys general to urge the maximum possible funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in the Fiscal Year 2025 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. Robust investment in LSC is critical to meeting the needs of low-income Americans across the country who otherwise would not have access to essential civil legal services needed to protect their homes, their safety, and their physical and financial health.

LSC was charged by Congress at its inception in 1974 with the responsibility of ensuring that under-resourced individuals and

families from small towns to big cities can obtain legal assistance when confronting civil legal crises. With federal support, LSC works towards this goal year after year, and currently funds 131 legal services programs in 900 locations serving every county in every state, the District of Columbia, and the territories. LSC grantees provide exceptional, localized legal services to over 1.8 million children and adults across the nation. However, the needs of struggling Americans have for years outpaced LSC's federal funding, and nearly half of those seeking legal help are turned away each year due to lack of resources.

As our nation continues to recover after the pandemic, our underserved communities still face frequent and profound legal crises. Nearly three-quarters of low-income families have confronted a potentially life-altering civil legal challenge in the past year. Domestic violence cases continue to rise and are three times more prevalent among low-income women. The vast majority of lower-income consumers facing debt collection proceedings do not have legal representation. Children and families impacted by the opioid epidemic encounter difficulties accessing housing and custodial support, and resources to facilitate recovery and re-entry. LSC leverages its federal resources to the fullest every year so that its grantees can provide on-the-ground legal assistance to underserved Americans meeting seemingly insurmountable obstacles, including our country's veterans, Native American community, individuals with disabilities, agricultural workers, and elders:

- LSC grantees assisted with over 312,000 housing cases in 2022, representing a 23.8% increase over the prior year. The ongoing housing insecurity crisis continues to drive more low-income households to seek assistance from legal aid. As of May 2023, there are 1,641,263 low-income households at immediate risk of eviction.¹ Housing cases have accounted for the highest volume of grantees' legal work over the past two years because so many low-income households are behind on rent. States and localities continue to rely on legal aid to assist the millions facing eviction.
- LSC has created a Rural Justice Task Force to study the challenges of delivering legal services to rural and remote areas. Ten million Americans in rural communities qualify for LSC-funded legal services, yet 86% of rural households requesting assistance received no help. Overall, 40% of all counties in the U.S. have less than one lawyer per 1,000 residents.² Many areas have no lawyers at all. This problem is compounded for older Americans residing in rural areas who rely on civil legal assistance to safeguard their rights. Elderly community members frequently face obstacles in transportation, making it difficult to access legal aid available in urban centers. Addressing the legal needs of older Americans in rural areas requires targeted efforts, including mobile legal clinics, community outreach programs and

¹ Final FY2025 LSC Budget Request, <https://lsc-live.app.box.com/s/oi1atcgn8xmvojc70aildz3bhg5p0zn5>.

² *Id.* (citing Am. Bar Ass'n, Profile of the Legal Profession 2 (2020), <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2020/07/potlp2020.pdf>).

online resources, ensuring fair access to justice and essential legal services despite their remote living conditions.

The impact of LSC's work is vital and delivers much-needed results to almost two million individuals and families annually who otherwise would not have access to civil justice. However, for every individual or family served, another's needs go unmet due to lack of sufficient funding. We implore you to support these Americans by prioritizing investment in LSC. As attorneys general committed to equal access to justice, we thank you in advance for your partnership in helping LSC to deliver civil justice to those in greatest need.

The four co-sponsors of this letter—the District of Columbia, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma—are joined by the undersigned attorneys general across the U.S. states and its territories.

Sincerely,



Brian Schwalb
District of Columbia Attorney General



Christopher M. Carr
Georgia Attorney General



Andrea Joy Campbell
Massachusetts Attorney General



Gentner Drummond
Oklahoma Attorney General



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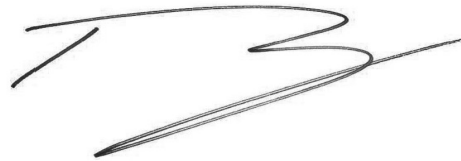
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