

Legal Services Corporation Optimistic about Bipartisan Support in Congress Despite White House Proposal to Defund

President

James J. Sandman

Board of Directors

John G. Levi
Chicago, IL
Chairman

Martha Minow
Cambridge, MA
Vice Chair

Robert J. Grey, Jr.
Richmond, VA

Harry J. F. Korrell
Seattle, WA

Victor B. Maddox
Louisville, KY

Laurie Mikva
Chicago, IL

Fr. Pius Pietrzyk, OP
Zanesville, OH

Julie A. Reiskin
Denver, CO

Gloria Valencia-Weber
Albuquerque, NM

WASHINGTON – The White House’s Fiscal Year 2020 budget proposal calls for defunding the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) for the third year in row. The budget appendix released today designates \$18.2 million for costs to close LSC down. LSC remains optimistic about congressional support for its funding and has submitted its own 2020 budget request for \$593 million. This is an increase over last year’s request of \$564.8 million.

“I believe that the bipartisan support LSC has enjoyed in Congress for almost 45 years will continue long into the future,” said LSC President Jim Sandman. “We are grateful that Congress recognizes LSC’s vital importance in ensuring equal access to justice and has increased our funding in each of the last two fiscal years.”

LSC is the nation's single largest funder of civil legal aid. LSC was created in 1974 by an act of Congress that was signed into law by President Nixon. LSC works to ensure that low-income Americans receive the help they need in civil legal matters like evictions, foreclosures, child custody, adoptions, and protective orders against domestic abusers. Congress continues to fund LSC each year so that low-income constituents have access to high-quality legal assistance in such matters.

The Budget proposes to eliminate funding for LSC to “put more control in the hands of State and local governments that better understand the needs of their communities.” But the legal aid programs that LSC funds are locally controlled and already set their own priorities based on their assessments of their communities’ needs. LSC distributes more than 93% of its funding to locally run organizations.

Federal funding for LSC reflects the fundamental national interest in the rule of law. Eliminating LSC funding would effectively eliminate civil legal aid in some states and diminish it in every state, with a resulting loss of confidence in the fairness of the justice system for those who cannot afford to pay for legal assistance. Today, even with federal funding of LSC, in many jurisdictions 90% or more of family cases and

landlord-tenant cases involve unrepresented litigants, and legal aid providers must regularly turn away at least half of the eligible clients seeking their help.

Following the President's proposal to defund LSC the previous two years, Congress has continued to allocate funds for the organization. In March 2018, Congress funded LSC at \$410 million, a \$25 million increase from FY 2017. This was the largest increase to LSC's budget since FY 2010. Last month, Congress again increased LSC's funding, to \$415 million, a \$5 million increase.

The 132 legal aid programs that LSC funds serve every county in every state and the territories. They protect seniors from consumer scams, help veterans secure the benefits they have earned, assist domestic violence victims in obtaining protection orders against abusers, and help disaster survivors get back on their feet. Federal funding for civil legal services provides crucial assistance to hundreds of thousands of Americans each year.