

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science, and Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Senate Dirksen Building, Room 142  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science, and Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Senate Dirksen Building, Room 142  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Shaheen:

Thank you for including \$50 million in supplemental funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136). Those funds will immediately help LSC's grantees respond to civil legal issues of low-income Americans affected by the escalating public health crisis.

LSC has distributed all the funds in the CARES Act to grantees across the country. LSC distributed \$2.4 million of that funding through Telework Capacity Building Grants designed to help grantees transition to operating remotely, including virtual court proceedings. LSC distributed the remaining funds countrywide with an emphasis on regions hardest hit by COVID-19.

LSC anticipates the demand for legal services will increase significantly. Therefore, we request that an **additional \$50 million be included in the next emergency supplemental appropriation** to help LSC's grantees meet the rising demand for legal assistance during this pandemic.

During a recent webinar held by LSC, 82% of grantees reported increased requests for assistance. The issues range from housing, domestic violence, child custody, medical debt, mortgage foreclosures, and bankruptcies. While legal aid programs prepare for a tidal wave of people in need of help, they are also bracing for funding shortfalls of their own.

There has already been a big increase in domestic violence. Shelter-in-place orders and economic uncertainty compound the stress on households, especially low-income households. Many police departments across the U.S. have reported increased responses to domestic violence calls.

Another concerning issue is reports of evictions and lockouts. While some states issued short-term moratoriums on evictions, others have not. Housing insecurity and homelessness were already problems for low-income communities, and the public health crisis will only exacerbate this. It is vital that vulnerable populations have access to legal assistance to ensure they are not pushed out of a home precipitously or unlawfully.

Looking forward, the need for greater access to legal services will only increase. The outlook for low-income Americans is increasingly dire as economic conditions deteriorate. On April 23rd, 2020, the Department of Labor reported 4.4 million more people filed unemployment claims, bringing a grim total of over 26 million since the COVID-19 shutdowns began.

LSC's grantees rely on additional funding sources besides annual Congressional appropriations; however, 95% of grantees expect funding from those other sources to decline. Similarly, 93% of grantees anticipate declines in funding from Interest on Legal Trust Accounts (IOLTAs), amounting to millions of dollars in various jurisdictions. State bar associations require practicing attorneys to place certain client funds in these trust accounts. The interest earned is then distributed to legal aid organizations. Because the Federal Reserve recently lowered interest rates to 0%, IOLTA funding will dry up. Additional funding by Congress is necessary to help grantees avoid service reductions as the demand for services increases.

Our nation needs stability during this pandemic, and LSC and its grantees play an important role providing legal services for the rising number of people who are eligible. We hope you will continue to ensure equal access to justice remain a foundational principle of our nation and respectfully request support for more LSC supplemental funding.

Sincerely,



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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



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John Cornyn  
United States Senator



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Daniel Sullivan  
United States Senator



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Dick Durbin  
United States Senator

Cc: Sens. Shelby and Leahy  
Sens. McConnell and Schumer