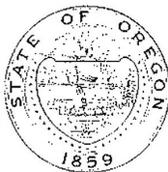


Thomas A. Balmer  
Chief Justice



OREGON SUPREME COURT

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March 31, 2017

Hon. Suzanne Bonamici  
U.S. Representative  
439 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bonamici,

I write on behalf of the Oregon Judicial Department in response to the President's budget proposal to Congress eliminating funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in fiscal year 2018. Without a doubt, the elimination or reduction of the LSC's appropriation would have tragic consequences. The LSC enables thousands of citizens in Oregon and across the country to obtain competent legal services in matters involving basic human needs, such as protection from domestic violence, securing veteran benefits, and maintaining habitable housing. I urge you to take all reasonable steps to promote stable and adequate funding of the LSC, rather than eliminating LSC funding. In the following paragraphs, I provide important background information and a possible way to promote adequate funding for the LSC.

Census Bureau data show that the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) client-eligible population is at an all-time high. Nearly one in five Americans (61.8 million people) are eligible for civil legal aid -- a 21% increase since 2007. More than 1.7 million military veterans are eligible for LSC-funded services. Currently there are insufficient resources to meet the increased need for legal assistance. Without adequate funding for legal aid, these low-income Americans are unable to access the courts to protect their legitimate legal interests. A growing number of domestic violence victims, tenants facing wrongful evictions, parents seeking child support, and others are forced to try to navigate the judicial system alone and without basic legal tools.

To help policy leaders appreciate the "justice gap" that occurs when large numbers of citizens are unrepresented by counsel, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators in 2012 published a data-rich policy paper entitled, "The Importance of Funding for the Legal Services Corporation from the Perspective of the Conference of Chief Justices and the

Conference of State Court Administrators." The research summarized in that paper makes clear that the large number of unrepresented citizens overwhelming the nation's courts has negative consequences not only for them but also for the effectiveness and efficiency of courts striving to serve these and other segments of the community. More staff time is required to assist unrepresented parties. In the absence of a fair presentation of relevant facts, court procedures are slowed, backlogs of other court cases occur, and judges confront the challenge of maintaining their impartiality while preventing injustice. Trial court judges report that the adversarial foundation of our justice system is all too often losing its effectiveness when citizens are deprived of legal counsel.

On behalf of Oregon's courts and judges, I ask that you support adequate LSC funding to fulfill our nation's promise of "equal justice under law." Toward that end, our friends in the House (both Democrat and Republican) have created an opportunity to weigh in. Congressmen Steve Cohen (D-TN) and Michael Fitzpatrick (R-PA) are orchestrating a "Dear Colleague" letter (copy attached) that will be sent to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee on March 31. The letter urges LSC funding at a level "to ensure that critical legal assistance will be provided to those in urgent need." We urge you to sign on to that letter before March 31 by contacting their key staff members -- Jackson Pineau, Rep. Cohen's office [jackson.pineau@mail.house.gov](mailto:jackson.pineau@mail.house.gov) or Joseph Knowles, Rep. Fitzpatrick's office [joseph.knowles@mail.house.gov](mailto:joseph.knowles@mail.house.gov).

I thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Balmer  
Chief Justice

cc: Presiding Judges  
Michael Levelle, OSB President  
Helen Hirschbiel, OSB Executive Director  
David Thornburgh  
Lou Savage  
Edwin Harnden