VIA E-MAIL:

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen  
Chairman  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
H-305, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515  
frelinghuysen.house.gov

The Honorable John Culberson  
Chairman  
U.S. House Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee  
H-310, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515  
culberson.house.gov

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510  
cochran.senate.gov

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee  
SD-142  
Washington, DC 20510  
shelby.senate.gov

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
1016 LHOB  
Washington, DC 20515  
lowey.house.gov

The Honorable Jose Serrano  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee  
H-310, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515  
serrano.house.gov

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S-146A, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510  
leahy.senate.gov

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee  
SD-142  
Washington, DC 20510  
shaheen.senate.gov

Dear Chairmen, Vice Chairman, and Ranking Members:

The Knoxville Bar Association is deeply concerned about the Administration’s call for elimination of funding for the Legal Services Corporation ("LSC") in its FY2018 budget blueprint. LSC provides vital civil legal aid to a wide range of Americans (1.9 million annually): securing housing for veterans, freeing seniors from scams, serving rural areas when others won’t, protecting battered women, and helping disaster survivors back to their feet.
LSC represents an important service to Members’ constituents; House and Senate offices across the nation routinely refer constituents to the local LSC-funded legal aid organization.

The U.S. Congress has passed hundreds of laws by which legal aid attorneys day in and day out secure the rights of individuals unable to secure their rights for themselves. Our federal government was founded on the concept of justice for all, and the federal government has a role in justice for all. Funding for equal justice under federal law is a federal duty, not to be transferred as an unfunded mandate to state and local governments. In short, the federal government must pay its fair share.

The late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia assured us that all of his colleagues on the Supreme Court supported LSC. The state Supreme Court Chief Justices also have consensus support for LSC. In fact, over 80% of Americans believe it is important that everyone has access to civil legal help. Also, over 80% of people are convinced that LSC grantees’ self-help centers and legal services assistance protect the vulnerable.

We know the value of LSC first-hand. Lawyers who are members of our Bar provide countless hours of pro bono legal services to individuals in desperate need of assistance. This volunteer service is dependent on partnership with the local legal aid organization, which screens cases for merit and eligibility, and trains and mentors 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 where there are few lawyers and small bar associations with limited membership. In many counties across our nation, LSC grantees are the only available help for low-income Americans.

LSC funding is money well spent. Multiple clean audits show that 93.7% of LSC’s total budget is awarded in grants to 133 civil legal aid programs with nearly 900 offices nationwide. Every county has at least one LSC grantee. Legal Aid of East Tennessee (LAET) is an LSC grantee, providing legal services to low-income Americans in 26 Tennessee counties from Chattanooga to Johnson City, Tennessee. Currently, LAET receives approximately 50% of its annual funding from LSC. LSC’s appropriation is quite modest; it accounts for 1/10,000th of the federal budget. Moreover, 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.

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 Bar Association urges that Congress continue to provide robust funding for LSC.

Sincerely,

Amanda M. Busby
President, Knoxville Bar Association

CC: Steven_Wall@appro.senate.gov
Taylor.Kelly@mail.house.gov
March 31, 2017

VIA E-MAIL TO STAFF:

The Honorable Bob Corker
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Phil Roe
336 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable John Duncan
2207 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann
2410 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Scott DesJarlais
2301 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Jim Cooper
1536 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Diane Black
1131 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn
2266 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable David Kustoff
508 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Cohen
2404 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Dear Senators and Representatives:

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Senators and Representatives  
Re: Legal Services Corporation Funding  
March 31, 2017  
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[Signature]

Amanda M. Busby  
President, Knoxville Bar Association