April 8, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Request for Additional Supplemental Emergency Appropriations for Legal Services Corporation to Address Consequences of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Dear Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Lowey, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Granger:

On behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA), I sincerely thank you and your congressional colleagues for including $50 million of supplemental emergency funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in the recently enacted CARES Act. As explained in our previous March 19, 2020 letter, this emergency funding—which was 50% of the $100 million LSC originally requested in its March 16 supplemental funding request to Congress—is critically needed to help LSC and its many grantees throughout the country to address the growing public health emergency caused by coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The ABA greatly appreciates this emergency LSC funding.

Although the $50 million contained in the CARES Act will make a real, positive difference in LSC’s ability to address the pandemic, LSC submitted a second formal request on April 7 for the remaining $50 million in emergency funding that was originally requested last month. As LSC explained in its April 7 request, this remaining $50 million will be critically needed to help its many grantees address the huge increase in the number of Americans who will qualify for civil legal aid as a result of the pandemic and the dramatic spike in evictions, foreclosures, domestic violence, employment and health care issues, and many other legal problems. The ABA fully supports LSC’s request for this emergency funding, and we urge you to include the remaining $50 million in the next emergency supplemental bill that congressional leaders are currently discussing.

1 The ABA’s previous letter to Congress requesting $100 million of emergency funding for LSC is available at https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/government_affairs_office/final-lsc-supplemental.pdf?logActivity=true
2 LSC’s April 7, 2020 letter and supplemental funding request to Congress is available at https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/government_affairs_office/lsc-covid.pdf?logActivity=true
The Legal Services Corporation funds 132 local legal aid programs which span every state and territory that serve constituents in every congressional district. These LSC grantees, located in more than 800 offices nationwide, provide essential legal services that directly benefit more than 1.8 million low-income Americans. These constituents include many thousands of families, veterans, older Americans, rural Americans, domestic violence survivors, women (constituting 71.6% of clients in 2018), victims of natural disasters, and many others.

As LSC noted in its April 7 supplemental funding request, it has already begun to distribute the initial $50 million of emergency funding it received in the CARES Act to its grantees and the entire sum will be granted out by April 30. To spend the money wisely and ensure that it helps the areas of the country most affected by COVID-19, LSC is overlaying recent unemployment insurance filing data with the current U.S. Census Bureau poverty-population data, and no more than one-percent of the funds will be used to cover implementation and oversight of the funds.

While the initial $50 million is addressing immediate needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, LSC learned from its 132 grantees that many of them are preparing for a “tidal wave” of Americans needing assistance. In particular, many grantees report that they expect a dramatic spike in evictions in states without moratoriums and in many other states after the current moratoriums expire; domestic violence cases and protective orders; employment issues and unemployment claims; medical debt collection and other health care issues; family law issues (including emergency child custody, visitation and support); elder abuse; and other legal problems arising from the pandemic.

Although we understand the constraints of the budget deal and other urgent needs that Congress must address in the next stimulus package, we believe that providing LSC with the remaining $50 million of emergency funding that it originally requested in mid-March and requested again on April 7 is critically needed and would be among the most cost-effective means of assisting many Americans in need. Therefore, the ABA fully supports LSC’s $50 million request for additional emergency funding and urges Congress to include it in its next relief bill.

Thank you again for your continued support for adequate LSC funding on behalf of your constituents and for your efforts to help all Americans get through this crisis. If you have any questions, please contact ABA Governmental Affairs Director Holly Cook at 202-662-1860.

Sincerely,

Judy Perry Martinez
President, American Bar Association

cc: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees
    The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House
    The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, House Republican Leader
    The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader
    The Honorable Charles Schumer, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Susan Brooks, Co-Chair, House Access to Legal Aid Caucus
The Honorable Debbie Dingell, Co-Chair, House Access to Legal Aid Caucus
The Honorable Joe Kennedy, Co-Chair, House Access to Legal Aid Caucus
The Honorable Fred Upton, Co-Chair, House Access to Legal Aid Caucus