

# **LSC TALKING POINTS**

**BACKGROUND:** The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) ensures "Equal Justice Under Law" by enabling access to the justice system for vulnerable Americans. LSC provides the backbone for America's civil legal aid and pro bono system.

**A FEDERAL ROLE IN EQUAL JUSTICE:** Americans believe in justice for all. Polling shows that over 80% of people are convinced that LSC grantees' self-help centers and legal services assistance level the playing field and protect the vulnerable by enabling equal access to the justice system. The federal government is instituted to secure people's rights under federal law. Federal funding cannot be withheld. States and localities cannot be burdened with an unfunded mandate for equal justice.

**A CONSTITUENT SERVICE:** Legal aid attorneys help constituents secure their federal rights, taking some difficult cases off the plates of Congressional caseworkers—a role complementary to and often more complex than the casework typically performed by 2 or 3 staffers in each Congressional office.

**NEED UP:** LSC's need is up. Over the past decade, the number of people qualifying for assistance has increased about 25%. Legal-services needs far exceed LSC appropriations. 50-80% of clients are turned away due to a lack of resources. According to the Census Bureau's latest figures, over 95.2 million Americans—one in three—qualified for civil legal aid at some point in 2014. Legal aid assists nearly 1.9 million Americans annually, including the following significant populations: 1. Veterans, 2. Domestic-violence survivors, 3. Aging Americans, 4. Rural populations, 5. Women (70% of clients), and 6. Natural-disaster victims.

**FUNDING ALREADY QUITE DOWN:** LSC's funding is down. Thus far, the current Fiscal Year 2017 LSC appropriation is already 17.7% lower than it was in 2010 (inflation adjusted). Compare LSC's \$385 million in Fiscal Year 2017 to LSC's average \$664 million (inflation adjusted) in the 1980s.

**EFFECTIVE LEVERAGING:** Government programs commonly work best when they leverage other funds. Many programs require an equal matching amount of money from nonfederal sources—a 1:1 ratio. LSC does much better. For LSC, the federal expenditure amounts to 25% of all legal aid funding in the U.S.—a 3:1 ratio. The federal appropriation leverages three times that amount by accessing alternative funding, such as Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) funds, state/local grants, foundations, contributions, and individual donations, and by engaging pro bono partners.

**EFFICIENT USE OF TAX \$:** Clean audits show that 93.7% of LSC's total budget is awarded in grants to 133 civil legal aid programs with over 800 offices nationwide. Each county has at least one LSC grantee.

**COST-BENEFIT:** Over 40 cost-benefit analyses demonstrate the valuable return on investment that LSC provides. For example, one state bar association published in March 2015 a report about the economic impact of civil legal aid organizations, revealing \$11.21 of economic benefit per \$1.00 invested. Benefits accrue from preventing foreclosures and domestic violence. These accomplishments are measureable public goods. The savings for the communities, the direct client and family benefits, and the well-recognized economic-multiplier effect guarantee the value received for LSC appropriations.

**EXAMPLE OF THE RESULTS OF LSC FUNDING:** A legal aid attorney in California spent a year and a half saving an elderly disabled widow of a Vietnam veteran from foreclosure. The elderly woman's husband was denied benefits after suffering from Agent Orange poisoning. She and her colleagues successfully blocked the forced home sale and managed to get \$45,000 in retroactive benefits and nearly \$1,500 in ongoing monthly payments from the VA, ensuring the elderly widow would be financially secure in her home.

**THE "ASK:"** Congress should return LSC funding to \$450 million—roughly the FY2010 appropriation (inflation adjusted)—before the dip in the economy. The economy is rebounding, and LSC funding should as well.