

Wisconsin Residents Need Strong Funding of the Legal Services Corporation

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is the largest single provider of funding to civil legal assistance programs for low-income Americans. LSC distributes grants to 134 independent local programs, and LSC grantees operate legal aid programs in each of the 50 states. LSC funding supports local programs which provide civil legal services to individuals at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. LSC grantees operate in each of the nation's counties and congressional districts, including rural areas in which lawyers are in short supply.

The country's poverty population has increased by nearly 12 million people over the past 15 years, and one in five Americans currently qualifies for civil legal assistance from the LSC grantees. These grantees assist 2.3 million Americans annually, including veterans returning from war, domestic violence victims, individuals undergoing foreclosure or other housing issues, those coping with the after-effects of natural disasters, and families involved in child custody disputes.

Wisconsin has two LSC grantees: Legal Action of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Judicare. The state currently receives \$5,157,609 in federal funding for LSC. The ABA and LSC are grateful for the \$10 million increase that Congress provided for FY15. However, the need for legal assistance continues to rise, with over 63 million Americans eligible for civil legal aid. Therefore, the ABA requests the Administration level of \$452 million for LSC for FY16. Funding the program at \$452 million will provide an additional \$1,100,962 in legal aid funds for Wisconsin in the next fiscal year, bringing the state's total to \$6,258,571.

Wisconsin needs Congress to fund the Legal Services Corporation at \$452 million for Fiscal Year 2016 because:

- Over 15 percent of Wisconsin families are eligible for civil legal assistance.
- Wisconsin's poverty population increased by 265,000 people since 2000, an almost 59 percent increase.
- Family and housing matters alone account for 56 percent of Wisconsin LSC grantees' total caseloads.
- Due to funding increases over the past two fiscal years, Wisconsin LSC grantees were able to close an additional 300 cases in 2013 than in 2012.
- Wisconsin is one of only three states that provides no state funding for legal aid. Furthermore, 29 percent of Wisconsin's total legal aid funding comes from LSC. Any reductions at the federal level will affect Wisconsin more acutely than most other states.
- Wisconsin LSC grantees assisted over 16,000 people in 2013, including 7400 children.

The Legal Services Corporation needs full funding to give its grantees adequate resources to serve the low-income people of Wisconsin. Funding LSC at \$452 million is critical to provide Wisconsin with \$6,258,571 to help provide legal assistance for its residents.