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June 1, 2006

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
123 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: FY 2007 Funding for the Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program

Dear Chairman Specter and Ranking Member Harkin:

On behalf of the American Bar Association, I urge you to support access to legal education for low-income and minority students and to fund the Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program at \$4 million for fiscal year 2007. Authorized under the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, and administered by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO), the Marshall Program provides qualified students with comprehensive counseling, tutoring and financial assistance to facilitate a successful legal education and career. Since 1998, the program has helped over 7,500 minority and non-minority students enter the legal profession, and it currently supports more than 800 students in 40 states through critical financial aid and technical guidance.

Promoting access to, and diversity within, our legal profession is one of the most important ways we can preserve and strengthen the public's trust in the system. Given that minority groups comprise more than 30 percent of the general population and represent less than 10 percent of the legal profession, the American Bar Association, represented by over 400,000 members from various backgrounds, believes that the Marshall Program is essential to increasing diversity in the legal field.

With higher education costs resulting in an average accumulated debt burden of \$84,000, those individuals who are already underrepresented in the legal profession

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are the ones who are most devastated by its financial burdens. The Marshall Program targets committed students who are unable to overcome financial and other barriers and provides them with assistance at a crucial stage in their academic careers.

The Marshall Program is integral to promoting diversity in the profession and cultivating respect for the rule of law. The program includes a roster of distinguished alumni who have gone on to make substantial contributions to the legal profession and the nation, as a whole. A copy of the American Bar Association written testimony, which details our support for the program, is attached for your ready reference.

While we appreciate the difficult funding decisions Congress faces this fiscal year, we strongly believe that the Marshall Program is a valuable investment in our justice system. We urge the Committee to fund the Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program at the requested amount of \$4 million.

For further information, please contact Kenneth J. Goldsmith, ABA Legislative Counsel for legal education, at (202) 662-1789.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert D. Evans".

Robert D. Evans

cc: Members of the Subcommittee

