

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 21, 2008

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman Subcommittee on Commerce
Commerce
Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member Subcommittee on
Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Senator Shelby:

We write in support of an increase in Legal Services Corporation funding to at least \$400 million in the Fiscal Year 2009 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. The Corporation has suffered through a decade of drastic funding cuts, small increases and financial erosion due to flat funding, government-wide rescissions and inflation. In FY 1995, it was funded at \$415 million, which would be \$576 million in today's dollars; in fact, however, its appropriation for the current fiscal year is \$350.5 million.

Thanks to your efforts and strong bipartisan support, the Senate-passed CJS bill provided the Corporation with \$390 million for FY 2008, a much-needed \$41.4 million increase over FY 2007 level of \$348.6 million. However, the end-of-the year FY 2008 consolidated appropriations act reduced the funding to \$350.5 million, a mere \$1.9 million increase. The Corporation would have needed a \$7.3 million increase (to \$355.9 million) just to keep up with inflation.

We ask that you again provide a significant increase for this vital program as a step in restoring the Corporation's funding to the 1995 level, adjusted for inflation. The Corporation's bipartisan Board has requested \$471.7 million for FY 2009 in its attempt to close the "justice gap" in coming years.

Today, 50 million Americans qualify for federally funded legal assistance. However, a 2005 study by the Corporation's Board of Directors, "*Documenting the Justice Gap in America*," reported that half of all individuals who qualify for and actually seek assistance from Corporation-funded programs are denied help because of the lack of resources. A 1993 American Bar Association study and recent state studies consistently report that, despite the combined efforts of the federal program, state, local and private funding, and pro bono support, between 70 and 80 percent of the legal needs of the poor are unmet. Each year, tens of thousands of low-income individuals and families are denied access to justice because of the lack of resources.

The result is a continuing crisis in the ability of millions of low-income individuals and families to have access to our legal system. The most severe challenges they face involve natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods; national disasters such as 9/11; and family disasters such as job loss, divorce, health crises, and housing loss. **Other issues that disproportionately affect low-income families also require legal assistance, such as**, consumer fraud, turbulent weather conditions, and the current mortgage foreclosure crisis. In addition to affecting low-income home owners, the foreclosures are also forcing low-income renters from their homes.

The Corporation's grantees focus on providing basic legal services, in response to the intent of Congress that these federal funds should be spent on resolving day-to-day legal problems of individual poor clients. The Corporation currently funds 138 local programs serving every county, state and Congressional District in the United States and its territories. These local programs provide direct services to approximately one million constituents who struggle to get by on incomes below or near the poverty line. Those served include women and their children, survivors of local and national disasters, the working poor, veterans, family farmers and people with disabilities. Their legal problems involve family relationships (including domestic violence and child custody), housing, health care, employment, and many other basic needs. Our failure to resolve these issues causes even greater hardship for these persons, and often leads to their reliance on other government programs.

Clearly, large numbers of low-income individuals and families do not have access to the justice system to resolve their basic legal problems. Without continued incremental increases in federal funding, many more of our fellow citizens will be denied assistance in the future. **We urge you, therefore, to fund the Legal Services Corporation at no less than \$400 million for the coming fiscal year to help meet this urgent need.**

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



EDWARD M. KENNEDY



GORDON H. SMITH



PETE V. DOMENICI



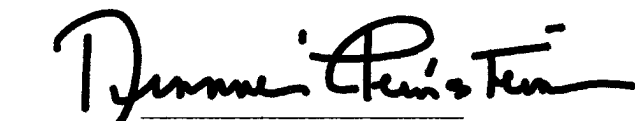
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BLANCHE L. LINCOLN



MARK L. PRYOR



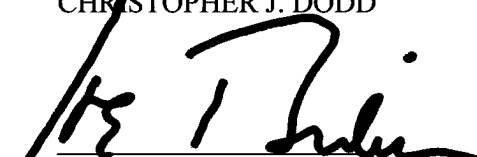
DIANNE FEINSTEIN



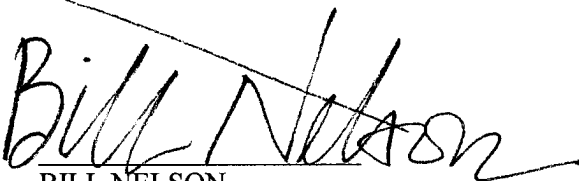
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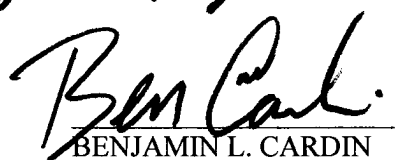

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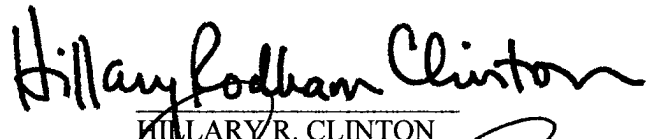

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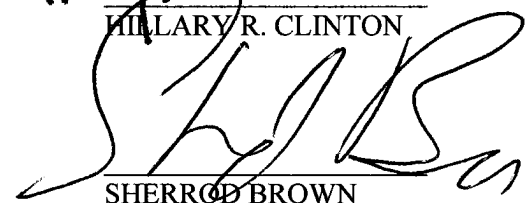

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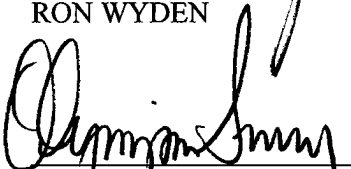

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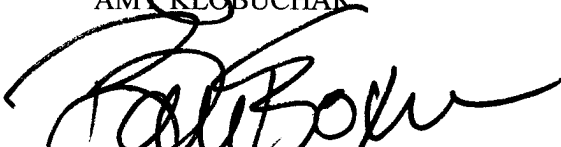

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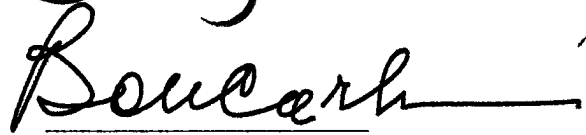

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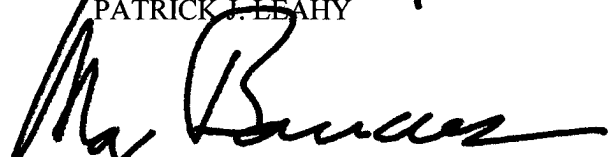

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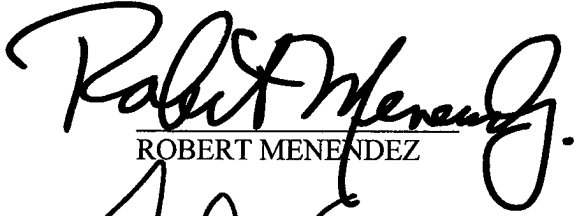

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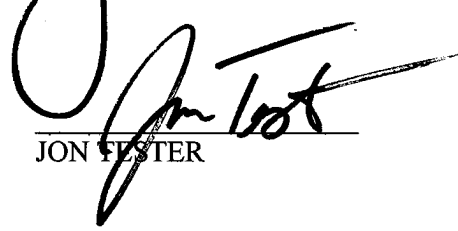
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