On behalf of Victims of Crime, Anti-Domestic Violence Groups
Seek Increased Funding for the Legal Services Corporation

November 14, 2017

Dear U.S. House and Senate Appropriators:

In support of victims of crime and as leaders and experts in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence, we write to oppose any funding cut to the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), and in fact, to seek increased funding for civil legal aid provided through LSC.

1 in 3 women and 1 in 7 men in the U.S. have been subjected to rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner. These victims frequently suffer an array of legal problems as a consequence of the violence, including the need for protection orders, child custody, access to housing, job protections, health care, privacy protections, and more. The issue cannot be ignored.

**Access to civil justice is critical to safety.** Research shows that 83% of victims with an attorney obtained a court order to protect against the immediate threat of violence, compared to only 32% of victims without an attorney.

**Intimate partner violence is a focus of LSC-funded agencies.** Family law and domestic violence matters are the largest category of cases that LSC-funded programs handle—32% in 2015 or about 1/3 of their cases. According to the latest year of statistics, in 2015, LSC grantees provided legal assistance to more than a quarter million (286,000) domestic violence victims and family members.

**Legal aid is effective.** Studies show that increasing access to civil legal aid is one of the most effective strategies to curb rates of gender-based violence. LSC lawyers assist victims in obtaining custody of vulnerable children and child support, ensuring equitable distribution of divorce assets, and enforcing access to necessary medical care, housing, employment, and other essential services. Access to civil legal services is a high priority issue for victims of domestic and sexual violence and their families because of the many related problems that threaten survivors’ safety and stability.

**The economic benefits are significant.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate the expense of U.S. intimate partner violence at more than $5.8 billion every year in health care costs, lost wages, lost productivity, and other expenses. Ensuring that victims have access to justice and safety prevents these long term societal costs.

**Indigent people suffer particular risk.** Department of Justice data show that women in the lowest income households are subjected to seven times the rate of abuse suffered by women in the highest income households.

**Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women.** A Department of Justice-funded study revealed that approximately 1 in 4 homeless women “is homeless mainly because of her experiences with violence.” Among women with children experiencing homelessness, more than 80 percent have experienced domestic violence.

**Violence damages health.** A Department of Justice study found that over 41% of intimate partner physical assaults cause injury and that 28% of these injuries result in victims receiving medical attention (over 75% of the medical attention requiring hospitalization). In addition to death and acute physical injury, domestic violence can have lifelong health...
consequences for its victims. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention report that compared to those who have not been abused, women subjected to domestic violence experience significantly higher rates of physical problems (e.g., stroke, heart disease, asthma, gastro-intestinal disorders, gynecological or pregnancy complications, chronic pain) and mental health disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, suicide attempts) that can lead to hospitalization, disability, or death.

**Efficient court operation is threatened.** Courts report that the large number of unrepresented people now overwhelming the nation’s courts has negative consequences not only for those people, but also for the effectiveness and efficiency of courts striving to serve victims of domestic and sexual violence and other segments of the community seeking dispute resolution. Equal justice under the law means nothing if competent representation before the law is lacking.

As the nation’s largest funder of civil legal services, **LSC cannot afford a funding cut.** The U.S. House of Representatives Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill (CJS) for Fiscal Year 2018 portends a severe cut for the Legal Services Corporation. This cut would have a devastating effect on victims who need to fight for access to safety, family stability, housing, employment, and healthcare as a result of the violence inflicted by their abusers. We encourage the final bill to reflect the Senate’s CJS bill.

In conclusion, we request increased federal funding for the Legal Services Corporation, lest “equal justice under law” be compromised for our nation’s victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Sincerely,

Futures Without Violence
Battered Women’s Justice Project
National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center
National Domestic Violence Hotline
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV)
Legal Momentum
National Organization for Women
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network
Just Detention International
National Housing Law Project
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
Jewish Women International
Public Justice Center
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
National Network to End Domestic Violence
Break the Cycle
National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence
Ujima, Inc.: The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community