March 2, 2017

The Honorable John Culberson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science Committee on Appropriations
H-310, The Capitol
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Honda
Acting Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

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

Dear Chairmen Culberson and Shelby and Ranking Members Honda and Mikulski:

We write on behalf of aging organizations in response to the U.S. House of Representatives Budget report proposing to eliminate the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) and instead to devolve the funding duties for indigent legal services solely to states and localities.

Clients who are 60 and older represent approximately 16% of the clients served by LSC grantees. Annually LSC grantees assist an estimated 190,000 seniors and their family members with legal issues. 80% of programs receiving Older Americans Act legal services funds are primarily funded by LSC, so the ability of these programs to serve seniors heavily hinges on LSC funding.

In stating, “It is the duty of State and local governments to provide legal services to those individuals unable to provide it for themselves,” the Budget report evinces a clear understanding that to ensure equal justice under law, legal representation is needed.

We are cognizant of severe cuts to LSC’s budget being contemplated in the Congress. If these dire actions were to come to fruition, the justice gap suffered by LSC grantees and their senior clients would widen.

Courts report that the large number of unrepresented citizens overwhelming the nation's courts has negative consequences not only for them, but also for the effectiveness and efficiency of courts striving to serve older Americans and other segments of the community seeking dispute resolution. Equal justice under the law means nothing if competent representation before the law is lacking.

Legal aid clients secure their rights through federal, state, and local law—not exclusively state and local law. Legal aid attorneys day in and day out secure the rights of older Americans unable to secure their rights for themselves.
Funding for equal justice under federal law is a federal duty, not to be transferred as an unfunded mandate to state and local governments. In short, the federal government must pay its fair share.

In conclusion, we affirm the importance of increased federal funding for the Legal Services Corporation, lest “equal justice under law” be compromised for our nation’s older Americans.

Sincerely,

**Howard Bedlin**  
Vice President, Public Policy and Advocacy  
National Council on Aging

**Greg O’Neill, PhD**  
Director, Public Policy  
The Gerontological Society of America

**Amy Gotwals**  
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National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs

**Robyn Grant, MSW**  
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The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

**Robert Blancato**  
Executive Director  
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs

**Kathleen Quinn**  
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National Adult Protective Services Association

**Bill Benson**  
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