Join the Congressional Access to Legal Aid Caucus

Approximately 80% of low- and middle-income Americans have serious legal needs that go unmet.

Dear Colleague,

We invite you to join us as members of the Congressional Access to Legal Aid Caucus which supports giving every American a fair shot in legal proceedings and the opportunity to be heard. From veterans fighting for benefits rightfully earned to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault seeking a protective order against an abuser, all Americans deserve to know their rights and have a fair opportunity for justice.

There is no substitute for the counsel of a competent lawyer but, unfortunately, far too many people do not have proper access to counsel to ensure their rights are protected. In 2017, more than 60 million Americans were eligible for civil legal assistance under federal guidelines, meaning their income did not exceed 125 percent of the federal poverty level. Yet, according to a 2017 study on the Justice Gap, low-income Americans reported having inadequate or no legal help in 86 percent of civil legal problems experienced in the previous year.

Across the country, from Massachusetts to Indiana to Michigan, no state or community is immune from the legal aid crisis. Legal aid has proved to be critical in helping recover from natural disasters like Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Similarly, the opioid crisis raging across the country knows no state boundaries, and legal aid is indispensable in treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities.

Many states are working actively to address this problem. In Texas, Supreme Court Chief Justice Nathan Hecht lobbied the Texas legislature to increase funding for civil legal aid programs, the New York State Bar now requires applicants to perform 50 hours of pro bono services prior to admission, and Washington State has programs for limited licensed legal technicians to advise and assist civil court litigants in specified issue areas.

The opening line of our Constitution emphasizes the importance of “establish[ing] Justice” as a guiding principle of our country. As members of Congress, we take an oath to uphold these principles embodied in our founding documents. Please join us as members of the Congressional Access to Legal Aid Caucus as we work together to discuss innovative solutions to make good on our promise to provide justice for all.
To join the House Access to Legal Aid Caucus, please contact Eric Fins with Rep. Kennedy at Eric.Fins@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Member of Congress

Susan W. Brooks  
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

Fred Upton  
Member of Congress