

URGING SUPPORT FOR THE LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC), established by Congress in 1974 to operate as a private, nonprofit cooperation to promote equal access to justice, is a federal program which assists individuals in gaining legal assistance in civil matters. LSC helps veterans and their families, survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking, homeowners and renters, families with children, farmers, those with disabilities, the elderly, and many others across the nation, including here in Dane County.

Dane County residents who are eligible for civil legal assistance funded by the LSC span every demographic and live in rural, suburban, and urban areas. To be eligible for LSC-funded services, a person must have income below 125% of the federal poverty level. A 2016 analysis by the Applied Population Lab at University of Wisconsin-Madison found that for the period of 2010-2014, poverty had significantly increased in Dane County over that time period.

In recent years, Dane County has increased our own focus on equity and justice issues. The continuation of the LSC is important to ensuring that many individuals in our county have not just theoretical access to fair courts to protect their rights and decide disputes, but actual, meaningful access.

The civil legal aid provided by LSC grantees has also been recognized as promoting the effective and efficient operation of the courts. The Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) of the state Supreme Courts, a non-partisan organization comprised of the Chief Justices and Judges of every state, recently issued a policy paper showing that adequate funding for the LSC is necessary to better meet the demand for legal services, ensure justice for all, and ensure that court operations are not bogged down by pro se litigants.

In 2016, the LSC allocated more than \$5 million of high-quality, free civil legal aid in Wisconsin. The two Wisconsin organizations that receive funding from the LSC help solve nearly 12,000 civil legal aid problems for low-income Wisconsinites every year. They also leverage the federal investment into more than \$8 million annually in other grants and funding and achieve more than \$17 million in monetary benefits for their low-income clients. Further, they engage Wisconsin's private bar attorneys to donate more than \$1 million in pro bono legal services every year.

The consequences of LSC elimination will be immediately felt: Wisconsin Judicare, one of the Wisconsin LSC grantees, which serves the northern part of the state, has indicated that if the LSC funding is eliminated, it will have to close its doors.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Dane County Board urges support for funding for the Legal Services Corporation in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CSJ) Appropriations bill to ensure that this basic legal assistance will continue to be provided to individuals in urgent need.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be presented to the Dane County Congressional delegation.