

1 2016 RES-652
2 URGING SUPPORT FOR THE LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION
3

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

10 Dane County residents who are eligible for civil legal assistance funded by the LSC span
11 every demographic and live in rural, suburban, and urban areas. To be eligible for LSC-
12 funded services, a person must have income below 125% of the federal poverty level. A
13 2016 analysis by the Applied Population Lab at University of Wisconsin-Madison found
14 that for the period of 2010-2014, poverty had significantly increased in Dane County over
15 that time period.

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

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

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

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

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

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