

**LETTER IN SUPPORT OF
THE CIVIL ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT (S.718, H.R. 3764)**

February 12, 2010

Dear Senators and Members of Congress:

We write to urge your support for the *Civil Access to Justice Act of 2009* (S.718, H.R. 3764), an Act that would reauthorize and revitalize the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the backbone of our nation’s civil legal aid system. LSC is a non-profit corporation created by Congress in 1974. Funded by the federal government, LSC grants money to local legal services programs in every state, which, in turn, assist low-income families with the civil legal issues they may face – protecting spouses and children from domestic violence, fighting predatory lenders, saving homes from foreclosure, ensuring child support payments, and helping seniors and the disabled obtain necessary benefits.

LSC is in need of revitalization. Severely underfunded, LSC reports that more than half of all eligible clients who seek legal help from LSC-funded programs are turned away due to insufficient resources. Additionally, LSC-funded programs’ ability to help their clients is hampered by outdated restrictions, imposed in the mid-1990s.

The *Civil Access to Justice Act* would reauthorize LSC for the first time in over 30 years and would expand access to justice for the poor during this time of extraordinary need. The bill would: 1) expand access to justice by authorizing \$750 million in annual funding for LSC, the level necessary to return to the high water mark for funding reached in 1981, the last time a minimum level of access to LSC services was achieved; 2) lift a number of overreaching restrictions that prevent LSC grantees from most efficiently and effectively serving their clients; and 3) improve oversight and governance of LSC.

As the nation continues to reel from the economic crisis, civil legal aid has never been more important. More and more of our nation’s families are turning to the courts with pressing civil legal needs, and both individuals and society suffer when these issues are left unresolved, or resolved unfavorably. With the courts and legal aid programs now overwhelmed, Congress must act to help low-income individuals access and navigate the courts, which oftentimes is only possible with the help of a legal aid lawyer.

The *Civil Access to Justice Act* goes a long way toward renewing our promise to “equal justice for all” and ensuring that our neighbors are able to obtain the services they need to meaningfully access the courts. Please support this legislation to reauthorize and revitalize LSC.¹

Sincerely,

National Organizations

AARP

American Judicature Society

Alliance for Justice

Asian American Legal Defense and Education
Fund

American Civil Liberties Union

Boat People SOS	National Association of IOLTA Programs
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law	National Center for Law and Economic Justice
Campaign for Community Change (CCC)	National Center for Lesbian Rights
Center for Law and Social Policy	National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest	National Consumer Law Center
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.	National Employment Law Project
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety	National Housing Law Project
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund	National Immigration Law Center
Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation	National Legal Aid & Defender Association
Equal Justice Society	National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives
Equal Justice Works	National Senior Citizens Law Center
Evangelicals for Social Action	National Women's Law Center
Garvey Schubert Barer	OMB Watch
Independent Sector	Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP
Insight Center for Community Economic Development	Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
International Center for Civil Society Law	Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights	Service Employees International Union
Lowenstein Center for the Public Interest	Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
Lowenstein Sandler PC	UAW International and Local 2320, the National Organization of Legal Services Workers
Medicare Rights Center	Workplace Fairness
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund	Youth Law Center
National Association of Counsel for Children	

State & Local Organizations

Access Now, Inc. ®, Florida

Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE), Ohio

AIDS Legal Referral Panel, California

Alabama Civil Justice Foundation

Alameda County Bar Association, California

Alameda County Bar Association, Volunteer Legal Services Corporation, California

Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education

Asian Law Alliance, California

Asian Law Caucus, California

Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center, Washington D.C.

The Association of the Bar of the City of New York

Bet Tzedek Legal Services, California

The Bronx Defenders, New York

California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform

California Reinvestment Coalition

California Women's Law Center

Californians for Disability Rights, Inc.

Californians for Legal Aid

Center for Civic Values IOLTA Program, New Mexico

Center for Civil Justice, Michigan

Centro Legal de la Raza, California

Children's Law Center, Washington D.C.

Civil Justice Clinic, University of California Hastings College of the Law

Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc.

Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, Indiana

Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto, California

Community Legal Services, Inc., Pennsylvania

DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers²

Democratic Processes Center, Arizona

Disability Rights California

Disability Rights Legal Center, California

Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania

Don't Waste Arizona

East Bay Community Law Center, California

Education Law Center of Pennsylvania

Empire Justice Center, New York

Family Violence Law Center, California

The Fund for Modern Courts, New York

Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law, California

Hawaii Justice Foundation

HIV & AIDS Legal Services Alliance,
California

Homeless Persons Representation Project,
Inc., Maryland

Housing and Economic Rights Advocates,
California

The Impact Fund, California

Indiana Lawyers Committee

Inland Empire Latino Lawyers Association,
California

King County Coalition Against Domestic
Violence, Washington

La Raza Centro Legal, California

Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, California

Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois

Legal Aid Association of California

Legal Aid Justice Center, Virginia

Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County,
California

Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia

Legal Assistance of Washington County,
Minnesota

Legal Foundation of Washington

Legal Information for Families Today (LIFT),
New York

Legal Services Corporation of Virginia

Legal Services for Children, California

Legal Services of Southern Piedmont, North
Carolina

Legal Voice, Washington

Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice,
California

Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry in
New Jersey

Maine Bar Foundation

Maine Justice Action Group

Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Michigan Designated State Planning Body for
Legal Services

Michigan Disability Rights Coalition

Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance

Minnesota Legal Services Planning
Committee

Minnesota State Bar Association

Montana Access to Justice Committee

Montana Equal Justice Task Force

Montana Justice Foundation

New Jersey Association on Correction

New York State Bar Association

North Carolina Justice Center

Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation

Oregon Law Center

Oregon Law Foundation

Oregon State Bar

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Peter Edelman, Chair, District of Columbia
Access to Justice Commission

Philadelphia Unemployment Project,
Pennsylvania

Public Advocates, Inc., California

Public Counsel, California

Public Interest Clearinghouse, California

The Public Interest Law Project/ California
Affordable Housing Law Project

Public Justice Center, Maryland

Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities,
Washington D.C.

San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, Inc.,
California

Senior Citizens Legal Services of Santa Cruz
& San Benito Counties, California

Social Justice Initiatives, Columbia Law
School, New York

Student Advocacy, New York

Texas Access to Justice Foundation

University of the District of Columbia David
A. Clarke School of Law

The Utility Reform Network, California

Vermont Legal Aid

Virginia State Bar

Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil
Rights and Urban Affairs, Washington D.C.

Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless,
Washington D.C.

Washington State Access to Justice Board

The Watsonville Law Center, California

Western Center on Law and Poverty,
California

Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc.

¹ For more information about this letter, contact Rebekah Diller, Justice Program Deputy Director, at the Brennan Center for Justice (rebekah.diller@nyu.edu, 212.992.8635).

² The following members of the DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers join this letter: The American Civil Liberties Union of the National Capitol Area; Advocates for Justice and Education; The Archdiocesan Legal Network, Catholic Charities; The Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center; Ayuda, Inc.; Bread for the City; Capital Area Immigrants Rights (CAIR) Coalition; Central American Resource Center (CARECEN); The Children's Law Center; The Employment Justice Center; DC Crime Victims Resource Center; DC Law Students in Court; DC Volunteer Lawyers Project; Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project (DV LEAP); The Legal Aid Society; Legal Counsel for the Elderly; Our Place, DC; The Public Defender Service of DC; The Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities; University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law; University Legal Services; The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs; The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless; Whitman-Walker Clinic Legal Services Program; Women Empowered Against Violence (WEAVE). Due to funding restrictions on advocacy, two members of the Consortium have not joined this letter: Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP) and the DC Bar Pro Bono program abstained from signing this letter.