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 Additionally, LSC-funded programs’ ability to help their clients is hampered by outdated restrictions, imposed in the mid-1990s.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
Alliance for Justice
American Civil Liberties Union
AARP
American Judicature Society
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

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Boat People SOS
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law
Campaign for Community Change (CCC)
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest
Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation
Equal Justice Society
Equal Justice Works
Evangelicals for Social Action
Garvey Schubert Barer
Independent Sector
Insight Center for Community Economic Development
International Center for Civil Society Law
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Lowenstein Center for the Public Interest
Lowenstein Sandler PC
Medicare Rights Center
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Association of IOLTA Programs
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
National Consumer Law Center
National Employment Law Project
National Housing Law Project
National Immigration Law Center
National Legal Aid & Defender Association
National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives
National Senior Citizens Law Center
National Women's Law Center
OMB Watch
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP
Service Employees International Union
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
UAW International and Local 2320, the National Organization of Legal Services Workers
Workplace Fairness
Youth Law Center
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 Providers 2
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.