

What is the Legal Services Corporation?

LSC is the single largest provider of civil legal aid for the poor in the nation. Established by Congress in 1974, LSC operates as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that promotes equal access to justice and provides grants for high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income Americans. LSC distributes more than 95 percent of its total funding to 137 independent nonprofit legal aid programs with 918 offices that provide legal assistance to low-income individuals and families throughout the nation.

LSC promotes equal access to justice by awarding grants to legal services providers through a competitive grants process; conducting compliance reviews and program visits to oversee program quality and compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements as well as restrictions that accompany LSC funding; and by providing training and technical assistance to programs. LSC encourages programs to leverage limited resources by partnering and collaborating with other funders of civil legal aid, including state and local governments, IOLTA, access to justice commissions, the private bar, philanthropic foundations, and the business community.

The Corporation is headed by a bipartisan board of directors whose 11 members are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The board is chaired by Frank B. Strickland. Helaine M. Barnett, a career legal aid lawyer, has served as president of LSC since January 2004.

Who are helped by LSC-funded programs?

Three out of four clients are women—many of whom are struggling to keep their children safe and their families together. Overall, the clients are the most vulnerable among us and are as diverse as our nation, encompassing all races, ethnic groups and ages, including the working poor, veterans, homeowners and renters facing foreclosure or evictions, families with children, farmers, people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, the elderly and victims of natural disasters.

What kind of help is available?

LSC grantees provide a wide range of civil legal assistance to their clients. The most frequent cases involve:

- **Family law:** LSC grantees continue to help victims of domestic violence by obtaining protective and restraining orders, helping parents obtain and keep custody of their children, helping family members obtain guardianship for children without parents, and other family law matters. More than a third of all cases closed by the local programs are family law cases.

- **Housing & Foreclosure Cases:** More than 25 percent of cases involve helping to resolve landlord-tenant disputes, helping homeowners prevent foreclosures or renegotiate their loans, assisting renters with eviction notices whose landlords are being foreclosed on, and helping people maintain federal housing subsidies when appropriate.
- **Consumer Issues:** Twelve percent of cases involve protecting the elderly and other vulnerable groups from being victimized by unscrupulous lenders, helping people file for bankruptcy when appropriate and helping people manage their debts.
- **Income Maintenance:** Approximately 11 percent of cases involve helping working Americans obtain promised compensation from private employers, helping people obtain and retain government benefits such as disability benefits to which they are entitled.

How many are helped?

About 54 million people—including 18.5 million children—are eligible for LSC-funded services. LSC-funded programs close nearly one million cases per year nationwide and provide other legal assistance to more than five million people. The clients served are at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level threshold, an income of \$27,563 a year for a family of four.

The Growing Justice Gap

An overwhelming demand exists for civil legal services. In 2005, LSC's Justice Gap Report, the first comprehensive national statistical study of unmet civil legal needs, established that for every client who received service, one eligible applicant was turned away. Fifty percent of eligible potential clients requesting assistance from LSC grantees were turned away for lack of adequate program resources. Those findings were reaffirmed in an updated and expanded Justice Gap Report released in 2009. Using different methodologies, state studies also have found that less than 20 percent of the legal problems experienced by the poor were addressed with the help of a private lawyer or legal aid staff attorney. At a time when poor Americans are struggling to keep their jobs, homes and basic necessities for their families, it is crucial for the federal government to address the civil legal needs of these vulnerable people as a national priority.