

May 12, 2009

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on
Commerce Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Commerce Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Senator Shelby:

We write in support of an increase in Legal Services Corporation funding to at least \$435 million in the Fiscal Year 2010 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

Thanks to your efforts and strong bipartisan support, the Omnibus Appropriations Act provided the Corporation with \$390 million for FY 2009, a much-needed increase over the FY 2008 level of \$350.5 million. Yet this is still far less than the amount appropriated in FY 1995, which would be about \$578 million in today's dollars, and even farther below the amount appropriated in FY 1981--\$749 million in today's dollars.

Therefore, we are requesting the Subcommittee provide a further increase of at least \$45 million as the next step toward closing the "justice gap" and meeting the greater need that exists today because of the economic crisis, which has increased the number of foreclosures, the numbers of the unemployed, and the number of individuals and families who now qualify for federally funded legal aid. We understand that the President will also request \$435 million for FY 2010, and the bipartisan Board of the Corporation has recommended \$485.1 million.

Today, 51 million Americans, including 18 million children, qualify for federally funded legal assistance. The 2005 "Justice Gap" study reported that one in every two individuals who qualified for and sought assistance from LSC-funded programs was denied assistance because of lack of resources. Since 2006, one million more Americans now qualify for legal aid. The justice gap has clearly grown and is likely to continue to grow as our country struggles to emerge from the serious recession. Other major sources of funding for legal aid, including state appropriations, private giving and Interest on Lawyer Trust Account revenues are declining or are under severe stress. Each year, tens of thousands of low-income individuals and families are denied access to justice because of the shortfall in these funds.

The Corporation's grantees focus on providing basic legal services, in accord with the intent of Congress that these federal funds should be used to resolve day-to-day legal problems of individual low-income clients. The Corporation currently funds 137 local programs serving every state, county, and Congressional District in the United States and its territories. These local programs provide direct services to approximately one million constituents struggling to get by on incomes below or near the poverty line. Beneficiaries include men, women and children, survivors of local and national disasters, the working poor, veterans, family farmers, and persons with disabilities. Their legal problems involve family relationships (including domestic violence and child custody), housing, health care, employment, and other basic needs. Our failure to resolve these issues causes even greater hardship for these persons.

Without continued increases in federal funding, many more of our most vulnerable citizens will be denied assistance in the future. **We urge you, therefore, to fund the Legal Services Corporation at no less than \$435 million for the coming fiscal year to help meet this critical need.**

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



1. Ted Kennedy (D-MA)



6. Mel Martinez (R-FL)



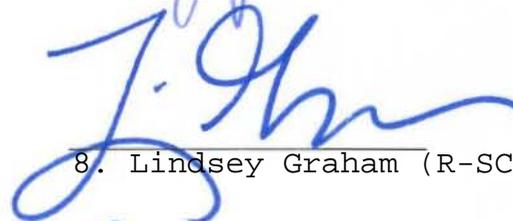
2. Tom Harkin (D-IA)



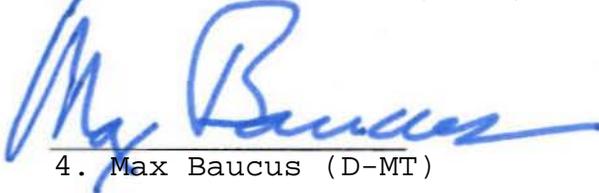
7. Olympia Snowe (R-ME)



3. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)



8. Lindsey Graham (R-SC)



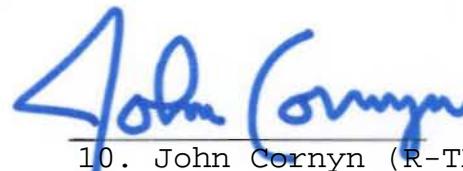
4. Max Baucus (D-MT)



9. Bob Corker (R-TN)



5. Mark Begich (D-AK)



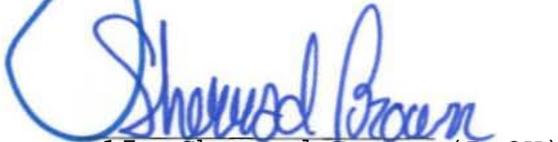
10. John Cornyn (R-TX)


11. Bob Casey, Jr. (D-PA)


12. Chris Dodd (D-CT)

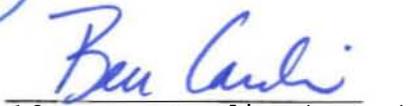

13. John F. Kerry (D-MA)


14. Jack Reed (D-RI)


15. Sherrod Brown (D-OH)


16. Joe Lieberman (I-CT)


17. Jon Tester (D-MT)


18. Ben Cardin (D-MD)


19. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV)


20. Ted Kaufman (D-DE)


21. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)

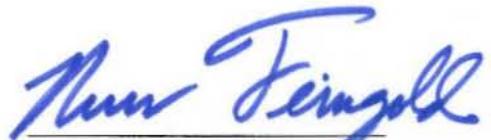

22. Carl Levin (D-MI)


23. Kit Bond (R-MO)


24. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)


25. Diane McCaskill (D-MO)


26. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)


27. Norm Feingold (D-WI)


28. Robert Menendez (D-NJ)



29. Herb Kohl (D-WI)



38. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)



30. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)



39. Charles Schumer (D-NY)



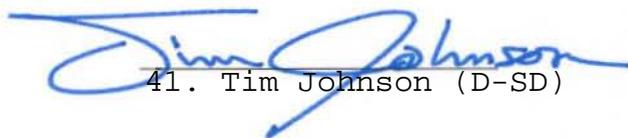
31. Mark Udall (D-CO)



40. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ)



32. Daniel Akaka (D-HI)



41. Tim Johnson (D-SD)



33. Patrick Leahy (D-VT)



42. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)



34. Bill Nelson (D-FL)



43. Tom Udall (D-NM)



35. Ron Wyden (D-OR)



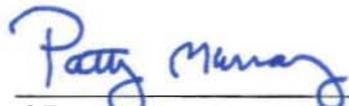
44. Bernie Sanders (I-VT)



36. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR)



45. Maria Cantwell (D-WA)



37. Patty Murray (D-WA)



46. Jeff Merkley (D-OR)

Roland W. Burris

47. Roland Burris (D-IL)

Jim Webb

50. Jim Webb (D-VA)

Mark R. Warner

48. Mark Warner (D-VA)

Kay R. Hagan

51. Kay Hagan (D-NC)

Michael F. Bennet

49. Michael Bennet (D-CO)

Barbara Boxer

52. Barbara Boxer (D-CA)

Mary Landrieu

53. Mary Landrieu (D-LA)
