



**Remarks by John G. Levi
Chairman, Board of Directors
Legal Services Corporation**

**Reception for the LSC Board
Louisville Bar Association
October 18, 2010**

Thank you.

Justice [Lisabeth] Abramson, it is a privilege for all of us to have you here. It is an honor to be with you, and thank you for those very inspiring remarks.

Laurel Doheny, thank you and the Bar Association for hosting this reception. Cynthia Young and the four LSC programs, thank you for organizing this evening's program and for your efforts to involve private attorneys in legal services work.

And a special thank you to the many Kentucky law firms and practitioners who support civil legal assistance—it is wonderful to have so many of you here this evening.

It has been a compelling and profoundly moving day we have had here in Louisville for the first meeting of our newly appointed LSC Board. We heard from the LSC grantees in Kentucky this morning—thank you Jeff Been, Richard Cullison, Scott Crocker and Cynthia Elliott for your terrific presentations. We heard from LSC grantees on the problems of service delivery in rural America—thank you Cynthia, Adrienne Worthy of West Virginia, Larry Harley of Southwest Virginia, Dave Yoder of Eastern Tennessee, James Daniel of Ohio and Norman Metzger of Indiana for helping us understand the daunting issues that you face.

We also had another informative and insightful round table with distinguished Judges Roger Crittenden, Janet Stumbo and James Moyer on the start of the Access to Justice Commission in Kentucky.

Kentucky's remarkable Bill Robinson, the ABA president-elect, offered comments at both round tables, enriching the discussions.

The support of the private bar, the support of law firm partners and associates, and the willingness of volunteers to take on cases cannot be overstated. From my perspective, what has come together somewhat haphazardly over the years in the area of civil legal assistance now likely represents one of the very best public-private partnerships in our nation. It is vital that we keep it strong and growing in order to serve the low-income Americans who come to legal aid offices every day across the country seeking help for their most basic legal problems.

This is a timely Board meeting. October is the month that the American Bar Association celebrates pro bono. This is the ABA's second national celebration, and it runs from October 24 through the 30th. It is a terrific way to showcase the important contribution that pro bono makes to our system of justice. We are here this evening to celebrate your contributions.

It also is wonderful to have the last regularly scheduled Board meeting of the year in this remarkable city and state. Let me introduce my fellow Board members.

I'll start with a distinguished lawyer you all know—Victor Maddox, a partner in the Louisville firm of Fultz Maddox Hovious & Dickens. Vic, we are thrilled to be here with you in your “Old Kentucky Home.”

Our vice chair Martha Minow, dean of the Harvard Law School, is unable to be here this evening, but has been attending meetings by phone, and is here in spirit.

Sharon Browne of Sacramento, a principal attorney in the Pacific Legal Foundation's Individual Rights Practice Group and a member of the foundation's senior management.

Robert Grey, a partner with Hunton & Williams in Richmond, Virginia. Robert is a former ABA president and has been tireless in his efforts to promote pro bono.

Charles Keckler, a professor at Penn State's Dickinson School of Law and a former deputy assistant secretary at the Administration for Children and Families.

Laurie Mikva of Evanston, Illinois. Laurie served for nearly 30 years as a civil legal aid attorney and a public defender in Illinois and Maryland.

Now, our next four Board members have just been confirmed by the U.S. Senate, and that means we now have a full Board that was nominated by President Obama and approved by the Senate. All of us have learned that patience is required in the confirmation process.

Harry Korrell, a partner in the Seattle office of Davis Wright Tremaine, and who, like me, specializes in employment law.

Father Joseph Pius Pietrzyk, of Zanesville, Ohio. In his prior life, he worked for three years at my firm, Sidley Austin, in the Corporate and Securities practice. He is now a priest in the parish of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Julie Reiskin, the executive director of the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition, a statewide disability-rights organization run by and for the disabled.

Gloria Valencia-Weber, a professor at the University of New Mexico School of Law and a leading expert on Native American law.

As you know, legal aid programs are stretched thin these days, and requests for assistance have never been higher. Just a few weeks ago, the Census Bureau released its poverty statistics, and they tell us what our programs probably already knew—that the picture is grim and daunting. Nearly 57 million Americans qualify for civil legal assistance at our fairly rigorous standard. And we are told that these numbers are likely to grow.

That means that pro bono volunteers are more important than ever before, and we must do a better job of reaching out to our colleagues in the profession.

Over the last several months, I have learned a lot, have had my eyes opened, as we have heard from grantees, IOLTA funders, state bar leaders, judges and academics about the desperate need for legal services by low-income Americans. The nation simply faces a crisis in legal representation.

We all know that the cornerstones of democracy, of our civil society, are freedom and equality of justice. And that justice is structured around a system of laws.

Whether you believe in big government or small government, in lots of taxes or little taxes, we all know that it costs money to live in a democracy. Over time we have established different entities charged with promoting and providing civil legal assistance for low-income Americans. Whether we like the approach that has evolved over the years, or whether we wish we could redesign how we deliver legal aid, is not my point.

At this juncture, we have just no choice but to make this approach work as best we can. The privilege of our license to practice law has a corresponding responsibility to ensure that access to justice is obtainable for those without means. Those of us who have the privilege to serve on this Board, those who work every day in the field and those who serve on our grantee boards, we all have a responsibility to educate the nation about the importance of equal justice and why it is a pillar that strengthens our democracy. If not us, then who?

The fight for equal justice, as you well know, is a call to our country to keep faith with its founding values. And I believe each generation has its own responsibility to the next generation to renew and strengthen those values. Our grandparents, parents and teachers taught us about fundamental fairness.

And in school we learned the Pledge of Allegiance and its stirring words—with liberty and justice for all. Not liberty and justice for those who can afford it.

The LSC Board greatly appreciates your hard work here in Kentucky in advancing the cause. We learned so much from your programs in this state and will carry you with us as we continue our work together.

Now it is time to honor these exceptional Kentucky citizens who have served the public interest and have donated so much of themselves to helping our country succeed in meeting its pledge of equal justice for all. Victor Maddox and Robert Grey, please do the honors.