

**Prepared Remarks by
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Board of Directors
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**White House Forum on the State of Civil Legal Assistance
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Good Afternoon and welcome.

I am John Levi, Chairman of the Board of the Legal Services Corporation. Thank you for joining us today for this important forum on the state of civil legal assistance in our country. We are so grateful to the White House for giving us this opportunity to highlight this serious topic, and to our distinguished guests, many of whom have traveled from across the country to be here. The Legal Services Corporation is the single largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans, providing federal grants to 135 non-profit legal aid programs in every state. Established by Congress during the Nixon Administration, the LSC is headed by a bipartisan board of directors whose 11 members are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

These legal aid programs are great public-private partnerships, obtaining, on average, more than half of their support from non-federal sources together with significant donations of time from private practitioners.

These clinics help women and children escape abusive relationships, families avert foreclosure, protect the elderly from consumer scams and assist veterans struggling to get the benefits and treatment that we owe them. Nearly three of four clients are women, and include Americans of all races, ethnic groups, and ages.

These programs are overwhelmed with requests for assistance. As a result of the recession, nearly 1 in 5 Americans—63 million people—qualify for LSC-funded civil legal assistance, because they live at or below 125% of the federal poverty guideline. That is an all-time high.

As demand has been rising, the combined funding for LSC programs from federal, IOLTA, state, local and all other sources has dropped from \$960 million in 2010 to \$878 million in 2012. The major contributing factor to the significant funding drop is that Congress reduced its LSC appropriation from \$420 million in Fiscal 2010 to \$348 million in Fiscal 2012.

Not surprisingly, the combination of increased demand and diminished funding has reduced LSC's ability to meet the civil legal assistance needs of low-income Americans. Recent studies have shown that we are forced to turn away 50 to 80 percent of those seeking help because of inadequate resources. And as a result of the funding drops our programs throughout

the country have been forced in the past 2 years to lay off 13% of their attorneys, 15% of their paralegals and 12 ½% of their support staff.

In January, at our LSC annual meeting we were addressed by the Honorable Deannell Reece Tacha, the new Dean of the Pepperdine School of Law and the former Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. Here, in part, is what Dean Tacha said:

“When the great majority of the individuals and small businesses of the nation no longer can, or believe they no longer can, get a lawyer, be represented effectively, go to court, settle their disputes in a fair and impartial way, and be treated like every other citizen, we quite simply, have lost the guiding principle of our republic—equal justice under law. When that goes, the rule of law goes, and when that goes, the great dreams of those patriots who founded and fought for this republic go with it—never to be reclaimed. Something must be done!”

We at LSC agree. We simply cannot let our civil justice system collapse; our nation has promised equal justice for all, and we hope today’s discussion will illuminate the crisis that exists in meeting that promise.

We will hear from two panels. The first will be moderated by Jim Sandman, the Legal Services Corporation President, and includes six executive directors of Legal Services Programs across the country. The second panel, moderated by Martha Minow, Dean of Harvard Law School, will include experts on access to justice, both within and without the federal government. And we will hear from three remarkable speakers, distinguished in the profession and in their service to the country: the Attorney General of the United States, the Chief Legal Adviser to the State Department, and the President of the United States.

Thirty-five years ago, as my father, Edward Levi, ended his service as the Seventy-First Attorney General of the United States, he reminded us in his farewell address that the values on which the country is founded “can never be won for all time—they must always be won anew.” We are all here today in that spirit, and no one understands what is at stake better than the current Attorney General, Eric Holder. A former practicing attorney, a Deputy Attorney General in the Clinton Administration, Attorney General Holder, as one of his early initiatives, established the first Access to Justice office within the Department of Justice. It is my great pleasure to introduce the Eighty-Second Attorney General of the United States, Eric Holder.