



CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE, CHANGING LIVES SINCE 1966

February 29, 2016

Rebecca Fertig Cohen
Chief of Staff
Legal Services Corporation
3333 K Street NW
Washington, DC 20007

Re: 2012-2016 Strategic Plan Goals

Dear Ms. Fertig Cohen,

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA) writes to express our support for efforts to update LSC's Strategic Plan, and, in particular, to join the National Center for Lesbian Rights in the recommendations detailed in its February 29, 2016 letter. CRLA agrees that to achieve the Strategic Plan's first goal to "maximize the availability, quality, and effectiveness of legal services," it is imperative that the LSC Board of Directors add an initiative to develop and implement cultural competency standards for its grantee programs.

As a long-established LSC program, CRLA is highly aware of the need to consider the specific challenges that especially marginalized communities experience in seeking legal services. Cultural, language and other barriers can impede marginalized communities' access to quality legal assistance. With respect to indigenous and LGBT communities in rural California, CRLA has recognized the unique vulnerabilities faced by these population and developed effective responses to help overcome existing barriers. Among other things, CRLA has carried out professional development initiatives to equip attorneys and staff with the understanding and legal knowledge necessary to effectively serve LGBT clients. CRLA has also increased its outreach to LGBT and indigenous communities, and updated its intake procedures to reflect the significant LGBT and indigenous populations that it serves.

Based on our experiences and successes, CRLA believes that it should be a core expectation that LSC programs acknowledge the diverse populations they serve and meet sound cultural competency standards. With the right resources and supports, legal services programs throughout the country can meet these challenges. Because our country has always been incredibly diverse and that diversity will continue, it is more urgent than ever to develop and implement cultural competency standards in the legal services context.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Cisneros', is written over a faint blue circular stamp.

CALIFORNIA RURAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

Lisa Cisneros, Esq.
LGBT Program Director