

Micronesian Community Network  
c/o Volunteer Resource Center Satellite Office  
McKinley Community School for Adults  
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August 24, 2007

Mattie Cohan  
Senior Assistant General Counsel  
Office of Legal Affairs  
Legal Services Corporation  
3333 K Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Mattie Cohan:

The Micronesian Community Network, based in Honolulu, Hawaii, would like to submit a group statement in support of the Legal Services Corporation's decision to change its regulations regarding restrictions on legal assistance to citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Belau who are legally residing in the United States of America.

This statement is being submitted in response to the call for comments regarding the proposed LSC policy change to 45 CFR Part 1626 described in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 72, No. 148, dated Thursday, August 2, 2007, pp. 42363-42366.

The Micronesian Community Network was created in February 2005. Its leadership is comprised of representatives from the three Freely Associated States who are living in Hawaii. It was an initiative supported financially by the Hawaii Community Foundation, the Volunteer Resource Center of Hawaii, and an advocacy group of Hawaii public health nurses and social services professionals (named "Nations of Micronesia") which explores ways to service the Micronesian migrant clientele in culturally appropriate ways.

The Micronesian Community Network has a vision of empowering the Micronesian communities to be successful, healthy, and as a unified group in Hawaii. Its mission is to facilitate the assimilation and harmony of Micronesians in Hawaii. It accomplishes these through the following, among other things:

- 1) to promote communication, harmony, and unity among Micronesians with the local culture;
- 2) to facilitate access to services like health systems, affordable housing, and social services;
- 3) to develop and improve education, leadership, and entrepreneurial skill, and;
- 4) to enhance and foster positive images of Micronesian as productive members of the society.

For the last several years, we have worked both in our individual capacities and collectively with others in Hawaii to seek extension of affordable legal aid services to Freely Associated States citizens. The Micronesian Community Network, for example, sponsored a law symposium titled "Micronesians and the Law in Hawaii" at the Hawaii State Capitol where we worked with the US

Department of Interior's Office of Insular Affairs field office representatives in Honolulu, Legal Aid Society of Hawaii lawyers, Hawaii State Representatives, a Hawaii State District Court Judge, the Honolulu Police Department, and other community leaders to examine legal issues facing Micronesians migrants as well as explore solutions for accessing affordable legal services. The symposium covered an assortment of topics that ranged from traffic tickets, drunk driving laws, deportation, bankruptcy and consumer law, comparative child protection practices and laws, Compact of Free Association rights and privileges while being a lawful resident in the USA, translation services and access to courts, housing issues, evictions and tenant rights, etc, etc.

As migrant communities in Hawaii and the USA, we do our best to be productive members of our new homes though we recognize that our overall impacts on the US States and territories we live in are significant and have progressively imposed major financial burdens on these places. But many of us are employed and or otherwise actively engaged in improving the overall quality of life in our adopted homes. We add to the economy by spending money and paying taxes that support the U.S. public services which many of us rely on. Our contribution should not be forgotten in reaching an understanding of the impacts of migration on Compact-impacted U.S. jurisdictions. In the United States, many in our communities are preyed on and victimized by unscrupulous employers and other parties who have little to no investments in helping Micronesians. The Compacts of Free Association confer on citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Belau the rights to "enter into, lawfully engage in occupations, and establish residence as nonimmigrants in the United States." That carries with it certain legal risks that make us vulnerable.

Changing Legal Services Corporation policy to reflect its pre-1996 regulations that allowed us access to Legal Aid Society services in the USA would be the just and right thing to do and would greatly aid those of us living in the United States who may need affordable legal services.

We appreciate this opportunity to submit this group statement in support of Legal Services Corporation's proposed policy change and thank the LSC for its role in helping us with accessing federally-subsidized affordable legal services.

Thank you very much.

Micronesians Community Network