

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

**LSC Board Meeting
Louisville, Kentucky
October 19, 2010**

This is the first meeting of the full Board that was nominated by President Obama and confirmed by the Senate. For Julie and Gloria, especially, this has been a long day coming. We are happy to welcome Father Pius, who we had the pleasure of meeting in Milwaukee, to the Board. Harry, it is great to have you here in person with us. Somehow we all made it through the process, and it is great to have the new Board complete and ready to go.

Since this is our first meeting, I would like to continue to amplify a few of the themes I discussed last night. I believe we are off to a good start—certainly it is a busy one.

- We embarked on, and are well into, a search for a new president. A number of applications are in—we had urged applicants to apply by last Friday—but we will continue to accept applications in coming weeks. We are hoping to conclude the selection process by year-end.
- Together with our incoming president, we will be undertaking the development of a Strategic Plan for LSC.
- We are in the process of launching our task force to review fiscal oversight.
- We are developing an important and timely research agenda.
- We are inviting grantees to our meetings to brief us on issues that are topical or regional, so that we get first-hand information from the field.
- We are developing new partnerships, such as our veterans' initiative with the VA, and continuing partnerships, such as our disaster relief project with the Red Cross.
- We are promoting innovation through TIG and are looking at our own internal technology to be in a position to offer webinars and enhanced teleconference communications.

- We are building on our prior Board's momentum to encourage greater pro bono through our Development Committee and a pro bono task force that will be established in the coming months.
- We will be looking for new resources, and although I'm not hugely optimistic about finding significant new revenue, we are going to give it a try.

These are projects we will discuss throughout the coming months. Today, I would like to take the opportunity to talk about our special responsibilities as Board members.

As I said last night, it is our responsibility—particularly in the roles that we have—to nurture, to take care, of our piece of the country's core values. We have been asked to tend to our government's overarching mission and bedrock value—equal justice under law.

I believe in some way we are keepers of the flame. While we share that obligation with many others, we and they, together, have a responsibility to let our country know when that flame is flickering too low—and we know that the nation faces a crisis in legal representation. Whether you look to the Justice Gap Report or hear from the grantees in the field, we know there is a huge unmet need in this country. Just this past Friday, The New York Times recognized this in its own editorials.

Going forward, I plan to speak out on these themes:

Number one—increasing resources for legal services to low-income Americans.

That starts with the Congress. Our current appropriation is not adequate. While I respect the debate and discussion we had at our last Board meeting regarding our 2012 budget request and the current economic crisis in this country, I feel I have to speak directly. Those of us in this room all know that even that request was far too low to meet the need.

Our grantees do terrific work, but they do not have sufficient funding.

While we are gaining greater bipartisan support, we also will have to do more to reach out to members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to more fully educate them regarding the circumstances in our country and we also need to pay attention to those who may still harbor reservations regarding LSC and its work and reassure them regarding our work.

Funding is a big part of increasing support for legal services but not the only way. After we get some of our other initiatives in place, I plan to ask you to launch a special task force on pro bono.

Our grantees have done a wonderful job in the last year of increasing volunteer, pro bono services. The Board needs to encourage pro bono contributions by the private bar and especially by large corporate legal departments. Every lawyer has a personal and professional responsibility to engage in pro bono activities on behalf of those without means, the low-income members of our communities.

We also must look for ways to more actively engage Access to Justice commissions. As we've seen in our discussions here in Kentucky, they support an expanding range of activities, such as statewide pro bono plans supervised by ATJ Commissions, innovative recruitment of volunteers, *emeritus* rules that permit retired and inactive attorneys to volunteer with legal services and other programs, and CLE credit for pro bono work.

And, of course, we can do more to elevate the profile of legal aid within the legal profession, to encourage pro bono and increased financial support, to encourage partnerships with law schools and others.

Number two—enhance communications between LSC and grantees and among grantees to foster the sharing of best practices.

This is an area where I think we can all do better. LSC has formal and informal arrangements that all share the goal of inspiring excellence and innovation. The NLADA annual conference usually has a workshop on innovations in legal services, and TIG holds an annual meeting that highlights innovations that can be replicated. Because our resources are stretched, we need to work with our grantees to see how we can all share our best practices with one another as they prove themselves, and as quickly and widely as possible.

While we recognize that there are many regional and local issues and concerns, we need also to think of ourselves as a national network, and find ways to leverage that to help us achieve common goals.

And, number three, improve accountability at LSC and at grantees.

We appreciate the work of our Inspector General and our Office of Compliance and Enforcement. The GAO is clearly helping LSC set up new procedures for its work. But we need to pay more attention to internal controls, especially in the financial area.

Grantee boards, in particular, need to make sure they have a proper audit function, and that they call upon outside auditors and their internal accountants and financial managers for evaluations on the effectiveness of their internal controls.

Our Board is committed, as we said from the outset, to be vigilant in this area and to make sure our dollars are well spent. This is of the greatest importance, and as an early step, the Board established the fiscal oversight task force to make sure we are meeting the gold standard.

We also must remember that LSC is an independent entity, and we must be careful to guard that boundary. We are not a federal agency for good reasons.

These are my thoughts. As I mentioned earlier, we will need to develop a new Strategic Plan for LSC. This is something we should do together and with our new leadership, and we will need your ideas for where the Board and Corporation should be going in the coming years.

Thirty-five years ago, on July 14, 1975, Roger Cramton delivered opening remarks at the first meeting of the Legal Services Corporation Board. He was dean at the Cornell Law School and the first Board chairman, and he concluded his remarks by saying:

“I hope and believe that the Board will be equal to the task ahead. We must approach it with a sense of humility, a regard for the decent opinion of others, and a prudent sense of what is possible; yet we must be fearless and bold in advancing and protecting what is fundamental. It is a great opportunity and challenge. We will give it the best of our ability.”

Today, we know that the number of people eligible for LSC-funded services are at an all-time high. Millions of people depend upon legal aid lawyers across the land. This Board will be equal to the task, and we will give it our best.

That concludes my Chairman’s report. Thank you.