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Opinion: Legal Service Corp. Funding is Critical to Justice for All



(<http://images.law.com/contrib/content/uploads/sites/292/2017/03/Legal-Services-Corporation-Article-201703310750.jpg>) Legal Services Corporation offices at 3333 K Street, N.W. in Washington, D.C.

The White House Office of Management and Budget on March 16 released its proposed budget for fiscal year 2018. The budget seeks to eliminate federal funding for the Legal Services Corp.—the largest funder of civil legal services in the United States. This proposal is in stark contrast to the bi-partisan support LSC has received throughout its 42-year history. Leaders on both sides of the aisle have long recognized that LSC and the programs it supports are vital to a well-functioning society.

Leaders in the business and legal community have come together in response to show their support and encourage Congress to fully fund civil legal services. On March 28, some 187 general counsel and chief legal officers from corporations across the United States joined a **letter** (<http://www.probonoinst.org/GCLSCLetter>), which continues to garner support and

additional signatories, in support of funding LSC at \$450 million for the next fiscal year. This amount would be consistent with funding received in 2010, adjusted for inflation. On March 9, leaders from more than 150 major law firms, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia, lent their names in **support** (<http://www.nationallawjournal.com/image/nlj/LegalServicesLetter.pdf>) of continued LSC funding. Pro Bono Institute is encouraged by this outpouring of support.

For more than 20 years, Pro Bono Institute has fostered the growth of pro bono legal services by legal departments and law firms to strengthen communities, engaging each year hundreds of departments and firms across the country. The legal aid organizations funded by LSC are an essential bridge to the pro bono services offered by legal departments and law firms, which often is done in partnership with LSC grantees. These services play an important role in supporting access to justice, but they cannot replace the assistance that legal aid organizations provide.

LSC-funded organizations protect the rights of families and communities through a wide range of services, including representation of domestic violence survivors, victims of consumer scams, low-income tenants, veterans and seniors deprived of public benefits, and many others. Reducing federal funds to LSC would obstruct access to legal services for almost two million of the most vulnerable in our communities each year, hitting low-income individuals and families hardest in rural areas and in states like Alabama, where 80 percent of funding for civil legal aid comes from **LSC** (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/legal-services-corporation/520083/>).

Pro Bono Institute stands with LSC and those who believe it should be fully funded. LSC and the legal aid organizations it supports are vital institutions that uphold this country's commitment to liberty and justice. The requested amount of \$450 million, which is less than one one-hundredth of one percent of the federal budget, generates a significant positive return for communities across the nation.

LSC responded to the proposed budget with a **statement** (<http://www.lsc.gov/media-center/press-releases/2017/legal-services-corporation-confident-bipartisan-support-congress>) that it is confident that bi-partisan Congressional support will continue. PBI is similarly optimistic that our lawmakers will continue to provide for crucial access to legal services for those most vulnerable in our society. LSC is essential to our justice system's infrastructure, helping to ensure that access to the courts and equal treatment under law are available to all, regardless of economic standing.

Eve Runyon is the president and CEO of Pro Bono Institute.