



# PHILADELPHIA BAR ASSOCIATION

March 13, 2017

The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator  
200 N. Third Street, Suite 14A  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

The Honorable Patrick J. Toomey  
United States Senator  
United States Federal Building  
228 Walnut Street, Suite 1104  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Senators Casey and Toomey:

On behalf of the 12,000 members of the Philadelphia Bar Association, the oldest association of lawyers in the United States, we write to urge you to support full funding for the Legal Services Corporation (“LSC”).

The Philadelphia Bar Association has a longstanding history of support for the provision of civil legal aid which helps ensure fairness for all in our justice system, especially those living at or below the poverty level. As you are aware, Philadelphia has the highest rate of poverty among the ten largest cities in the United States and civil legal aid has proven to be an invaluable and effective tool to fight poverty and protect the safety and well-being of low-income families.

Civil legal aid provides equal access to the law, delivers legal assistance in the most economical and effective way and has a positive economic impact on local communities. Philadelphia Legal Assistance (“PLA”) has been the local recipient of LSC funding since 1996. PLA attorneys and volunteers assist vulnerable individuals with their most basic human needs, including shelter, safety from domestic violence, child custody, food security, health, employment, and social security. PLA ensures that thousands of low-income individuals each year are afforded access to free, basic legal aid in the form of:

- easy-to-understand forms, including online forms, that people may easily use in civil legal proceedings;
- legal advice, including self-help centers, so people may know their rights; and
- legal representation in court for those who are too poor to afford a lawyer and have nowhere else to turn.

In 2016 alone, PLA provided legal assistance to 5,345 individuals including 343 veterans, 1,169 seniors, 474 survivors of domestic violence and 177 survivors of sexual assault in 5,538 individual cases. The legal services also benefited 6,513 family members of these individuals. Approximately one half (52%) of these cases focused on maintaining safe and stable housing, and 20% involved maintaining family stability. There were 67,750 unique visitors who accessed the PLA web site, 32,901 unique callers to PLA’s telephone intake

**YOUR PARTNER FOR JUSTICE**

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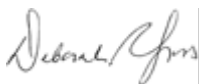
lines, and 1,186 individuals who came to PLA's walk-in intake hours. Legal information materials were downloaded from the PLA web site 18,676 times, and the statewide online family law court forms that PLA maintains were used 2,036 times. In cases with clear financial outcomes, PLA's clients in 2016 received an aggregate of \$712,482 in one-time financial benefits and \$392,008 per year in ongoing financial benefits. LSC funding accounted for 69% of PLA's revenue in 2016.

We are proud of the significant social and economic impact that civil legal aid has on our community. In Pennsylvania, studies have shown that civil legal aid yields an investment return of approximately \$11 for every \$1 spent in communities where it is offered. Moreover, across the country, civil legal aid has had a major impact in reducing taxpayer costs by preventing homelessness, securing health benefits, and averting harm from domestic violence. Providing civil legal aid is a smart investment that saves money and strengthens low-income communities.

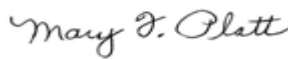
Unfortunately, LSC funding has been cut in recent years while demand for these essential services continues to increase. National and local studies have documented that only 20%, at best, of those in need are able to obtain civil legal aid and for each person served by LSC recipients another is turned away for lack of resources. It is imperative that legal services be adequately funded and we urge you to reject any attempts to decrease LSC funding in the coming budget cycle and to strongly support full funding for LSC.

Because this is so important to our members and to all Philadelphians, we respectfully request a meeting with you at your convenience during the week of April 10 to discuss this issue and its impact on all Pennsylvanians. We will contact your offices to schedule a time for this meeting. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Deborah R. Gross  
Chancellor



Mary F. Platt  
Chancellor-Elect



Rochelle M. Fedullo  
Vice Chancellor