

Memorandum in Support

NYSBA Federal Memorandum #1

February 7, 2019

ISSUE: ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR THE LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC), formed in 1974 with bipartisan Congressional support, was created to ensure that all Americans have access to a lawyer and the justice system for civil legal issues regardless of their ability to pay. The LSC provides funding to independent local legal services programs through a competitive grant process.

LSC clients include the working poor, veterans, family farmers and people with disabilities. Family law matters (including domestic violence and child custody) and housing issues are the largest categories of cases handled by LSC-funded programs.

Many beneficiaries of LSC funding were formerly middle-class, who became poor because of the breakup of their family, unemployment, illness, age, or disaster. A high percentage of legal aid clients have been women, most of them mothers with children. Many victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks have received assistance from LSC-funded programs, including family members of victims in need of help with social security survivor benefits, landlord/tenant issues, child custody and guardianship issues, emergency public assistance and many other matters. Further, significant numbers of low-income families have found themselves in need of legal aid to prevent homelessness resulting from foreclosures on sub-prime mortgages.

New York has seven LSC grantees: Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Legal Assistance of Western New York, Legal Services NYC, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services Committee, and Neighborhood Legal Services (Buffalo).

Congress has provided much-needed funding increases for LSC in recent years. However, the need for legal assistance continues to rise, with over 63 million Americans eligible for civil legal aid.

Based on the foregoing, the New York State Bar Association **RESPECTFULLY URGES** Congress to continue to provide adequate funding to LSC for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. Funding should be restored to the inflation-adjusted FY 2010 level of \$482 million to help ensure the civil legal needs of some of society's most vulnerable members are met.