



The Honorable Jose Serrano
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and
Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and
Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and
Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and
Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Serrano, Ranking Member Aderholt, Chairman Moran, and Ranking Member Shaheen:

The over 40 undersigned lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) and allied organizations write to express our strong support for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). We ask that Congress uphold one of our country's most precious values – that of equal justice under law – **and fund the Legal Services Corporations at its requested level of \$593,000,000 for Fiscal Year 2020.**¹

Established by Congress in 1974, LSC is an independent nonprofit organization that ensures equal access to justice for low-income Americans by providing grants to 132 civil legal aid providers in every state and territory. Each year, LSC-funded legal aid programs help struggling Americans have access to basic living standards by preventing seniors from having their homes taken away, obtaining earned benefits for veterans, and helping people who have been impacted by domestic violence. In 2017, LSC grantees closed 727,219 cases, of which over 70% involved women, more than 50% involved people of color, and over 18% involved people aged 60 or older.² In total, LSC grantees served over 1.7 million people.³

According to a 2017 LSC report, LSC grantees are forced to turn away 50% of the individuals who come to them for legal help due to a lack of resources.⁴ In fact, 86% of the civil legal needs of low-income Americans received inadequate or no legal help.⁵ Without increased funding for LSC, millions of low-income people, including those who are LGBTQ, will continue to be unable to seek justice.

¹ Legal Services Corporation, *Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request*, <https://www.lsc.gov/media-center/publications/fiscal-year-2020-budget-request-0>.

² Legal Services Corporation, *LSC by the Numbers: The Data Underlying Legal Aid Programs (2017)* (2018), <https://www.lsc.gov/media-center/publications/2017-lsc-numbers>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Legal Services Corporation, *The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans* (June 2017), <http://www.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/images/TheJusticeGap-FullReport.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.*

Because LGBTQ people face a higher rate of poverty than do non-LGBTQ people,⁶ we believe protecting access to civil legal services for low-income people is important for the LGBTQ community. In a report on the legal needs of low-income LGBTQ people, Legal Services NYC found that “[l]ow-income LGBT people are buffeted by the same forces that all poor people face and need representation in every poverty law practice area.”⁷ The civil legal needs of LGBTQ people are exacerbated by anti-LGBTQ discrimination, harassment, and violence. For example, low-income LGBTQ seniors face unique legal needs in addition to the common needs many low-income older adults encounter.⁸ On top of age discrimination and legal need for access to health care and public benefits, LGBTQ seniors suffer from the lasting effects of a lifetime without discrimination protections based on sexual orientation or gender identity.⁹ Such discrimination leads to “lower earnings over a lifetime and lower lifetime social security benefits,” especially considering the denial of spousal benefits to LGBTQ partners.¹⁰ Maintaining funding for LSC is crucial to ensuring that vulnerable communities – including LGBTQ people – have equal access to justice.

LGBTQ legal organizations alone cannot make up for insufficient LSC funding. Adequately funded civil legal aid is a critical legal safety net for our community. For example, the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) is a legal organization based in San Francisco that currently serves over 1000 LGBTQ individuals each year who are low-income and are seeking help with civil and immigration legal matters. However, NCLR does not have the resources to represent every person that contacts them who needs legal services and must often refer people to legal aid organizations or provide self-help resources to those who may have to represent themselves *pro se*.

We ask that Congress recognize the critical need for affordable legal services and acknowledge that ensuring access to these services reflects our country’s deeply held values and commitment to equal justice under law. These values are reflected in the fact that nearly 90% of Americans support LSC funding.¹¹ Congress can uphold these values by funding the Legal Services Corporation at \$593,000,000 for Fiscal Year 2020, which would allow it to better address the urgent legal needs of low-income people.

Sincerely,

AIDS Alabama
AIDS Legal Referral Panel of the San Francisco Bay Area
Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (ALAA) of UAW 2325, LGBTQ+ Caucus

⁶ The Williams Institute, *Adult LGBT Population in the US*, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/lgbt-adults-in-the-us/>.

⁷ Legal Services NYC, *Poverty is an LGBT Issue: An Assessment of the Legal Needs of Low-Income LGBT People*, <http://www.legalservicesnyc.org/storage/PDFs/lgbt%20report.pdf>

⁸ Denny Chan and Vanessa Barrington, Justice in Aging, “How Can Legal Services Better Meet the Needs of Low-Income LGBT Seniors?” (2016), <http://www.justiceinaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/How-Can-Legal-Services-Better-Meet-the-Needs-of-Low-Income-LGBT-Seniors.pdf>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Debora Cassens Weiss, *ABA Poll: Two-Thirds of Americans Support Federal Legal Aid for Poor*, ABA Journal, Apr. 20, 2009, http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/aba_poll_two-thirds_of_americans_support_free_legal_services_for_poor.

Athlete Ally
Black and Pink
Center for Constitutional Rights
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Coalition on Human Needs
Criminalization of Poverty Project at the Institute for Policy Studies
Equality California
Equality North Carolina
FORGE, Inc.
Freedom Network USA
Freedom Overground
GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Law Foundation of Silicon Valley
Legal Aid At Work
Legal Aid Service of Broward County
Mazzoni Center
Meals on Wheels of Central Indiana
Movement Advancement Project
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Immigration Law Center
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Women's Law Center
National Working Positive Coalition
NEAT - National Equality Action Team
Oasis Legal Services
OutServe-SLDN
PFLAG National
Positive Women's Network-USA
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
The Center for HIV Law and Policy
The National LGBTQ Workers Center
TRANScending Barriers
Transgender Law Center
Utahns Against Hunger
Whitman-Walker Health
Witness to Mass Incarceration
YWCA USA