

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 25, 2007

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman Subcommittee on Commerce
Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member Subcommittee on Commerce
Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Senator Shelby:

We write in support of an increase in Legal Services Corporation funding to at least \$380 million in the Fiscal Year 2008 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. In recent years, the Corporation had suffered through a decade of drastic funding cuts, followed by small increases and then more erosion due to flat funding and government-wide rescissions. In FY 1995, it was funded at \$415 million which would be \$494 million in today's dollars; in fact, however, its appropriation for the current fiscal year is \$348 million.

We are most appreciative of the \$22 million funding increase for FY 2007, which resulted in a seven percent increase for local programs across the country. We ask that you provide another significant increase for this critical program as a step in restoring the Corporation's funding to the 1995 level, adjusted for inflation. The Corporation's bipartisan Board has requested \$430.6 million for FY 2008 in its attempt to close the "justice gap" in coming years.

Today, 50 million Americans qualify for federally funded legal assistance. However, a 2005 study by the Corporation's Board of Directors, "*Documenting the Justice Gap in America*," reported that one in every two individuals who qualify for and actually seek assistance from LSC-funded programs is denied help because of the lack of resources. A 1993 American Bar Association study and recent state studies consistently report that despite the combined efforts of the federal program, state, local and private funding, and pro bono support, between 70 and 80 percent of the legal needs of the poor are unmet. Each year, tens of thousands of low-income individuals and families are denied access to justice because of the lack of resources.

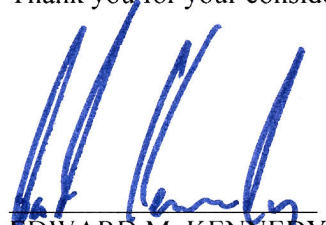
The result is a continuing crisis in access to the legal system for millions of low-income individuals and families, many whom face challenges that require such assistance. The most severe challenges involve: natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods; national disasters such as 9/11; and family disasters such as job loss, divorce, health crises, and housing loss.

The Corporation's grantees focus on providing basic legal services, in response to the intent of Congress that the federal funds should be spent on day-to-day legal problems of individual eligible poor clients. The Corporation currently funds 138 local programs serving every county, state and Congressional District in the United States and its territories. These local programs provide direct services to approximately one million constituents who struggle to get by on incomes below or near the poverty line. Those served include women and their children, survivors of natural and national disasters, the working poor, veterans, family farmers and people with disabilities. Their legal problems involve family relationships (including domestic violence and child custody), housing, health care, employment, and many other basic needs. Our failure to resolve these issues causes even greater hardship for them, and often leads to their reliance on other government programs.


Clearly, large numbers of low-income individuals and families do not have access to the justice system to resolve their basic legal problems. Without continued incremental increases in federal funding, many more of our fellow citizens will be denied assistance in the future. **We urge you to fund the Legal Services Corporation at no less than \$380 million to help meet this urgent need during the coming fiscal year.**

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



EDWARD M. KENNEDY



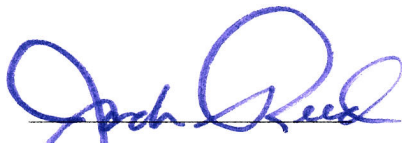
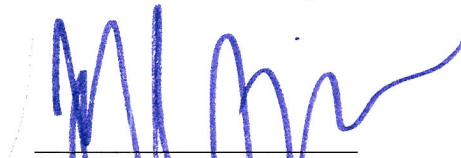
GORDON H. SMITH



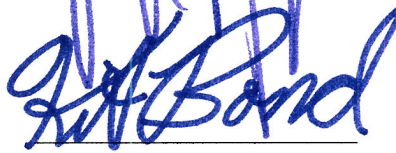
PETE V. DOMENICI



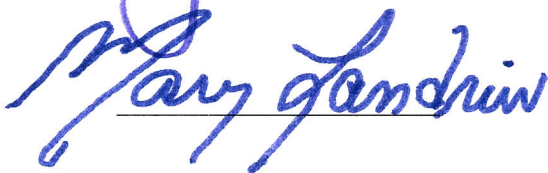
Ken Salazar



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Art Barnd



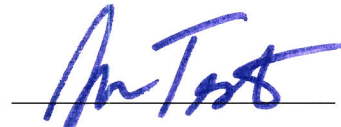
Mary Gendrin



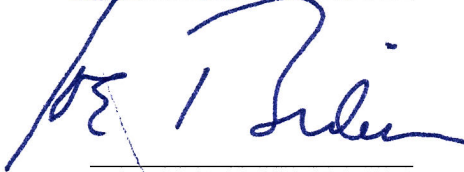
John Zsamer



Carol McCorrell



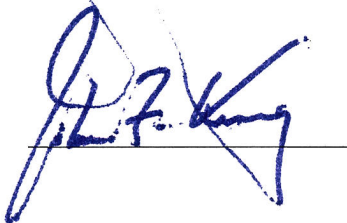
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