

Saturday, July 28, 2007

Carmen Chong Gum public comment

Legal Services Corporation Board of Directors and four of its Committees Meeting

Nashville, Tennessee

Thank you Alejandro!

My name is Carmen S. Chong Gum, and I am the Marshallese Outreach Coordinator for the Jones Center for Families in Springdale, Arkansas.

Good Morning to everyone and as Marshallese say, "IAKWE", which means, "Love to you and you are a rainbow".

Many Marshallese people have been living in Arkansas for many years and Northwest Arkansas has the largest number of Marshallese outside of the Marshall Islands living in the continental United States. As the Marshallese Outreach Coordinator of the Jones Center for Families in Springdale, I have been working with government and community leaders to address health, legal and education issues, among other needs faced by the Marshallese community in Northwest Arkansas.

Working full time as an outreach coordinator, I do a lot of information referral services, and some of the issues people come in for concerns legal issues. Some of these legal issues dealt with collection agencies trying to collect clients for large medical debts, problems with landlord evicting tenants and tenants not knowing their rights, clients signing contracts, and many other problems. Many of these clients have low paying jobs and cannot afford private lawyers. Legal Aid of Arkansas is a natural choice of helping our low-income population when they are not able to afford an attorney.

I hope LSC Board would consider making a decision in favor of giving eligibility for legal aid services to our Marshallese community living in the United States including people of the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau living in the United States.

I am very grateful to Legal Aid of Arkansas, its Board, and following staff for their valuable support in getting this issue be part of LSC Board meeting this morning.

Thank you and as Marshallese say, "Kommool Tata", to Legal Aid of Arkansas Executive Director, Lee Richardson, Jennifer Langley, Assistant to Mr. Richardson, and Alejandro Aviles, Community Outreach Coordinator & Limited English proficiency Plan Coordinator, who is with me this morning to voice his support, as well.

Thank you Charles Greenfield, Executive Director of the Legal Services Program in Hawaii, for being there to also voice this need.

Thanks to NLADA staff and Mr. Victor Fortuno, LSC Vice President & General Counsel for your diligent work in preparing the Rulemaking Options Paper ("ROP") to better explain this issue to LSC Board.

Thank you Legal Services Corporation Board, officers and members for visiting this issue of eligibility for the Marshallese community this morning.

Thank you once again – Komi Emmool! May the Good Lord Bless you all.

