



What is the Legal Services Corporation?

LSC is the single largest provider of civil legal aid for the poor in the nation. Established by Congress in 1974, LSC operates as a private, nonprofit corporation that promotes equal access to justice and provides grants for high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income Americans. LSC distributes more than 95 percent of its total funding to 137 independent nonprofit legal aid programs with 923 offices that provide legal assistance to low-income individuals and families in every congressional district.

Federal funds represent nearly 42 percent of the total funding that LSC grantees receive nationwide. LSC promotes equal access to justice by awarding grants to legal services providers through a competitive grants process; conducting compliance reviews and program visits to oversee program quality and compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements as well as restrictions that accompany LSC funding; and by providing training and technical assistance to programs. While ensuring that programs operate in the manner prescribed by Congress, LSC encourages programs to leverage limited resources by partnering and collaborating with other funders of civil legal aid, including state and local governments, Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts programs, access to justice commissions, the private bar, philanthropic foundations, and the business community.

The Corporation is headed by a bipartisan board of directors whose 11 members are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The board is chaired by Frank B. Strickland. Helaine M. Barnett, a career legal aid lawyer, has served as president of LSC since January 2004.

Who is helped by LSC-funded programs?

Three out of four clients are women—many of whom are struggling to keep their children safe and their families together. Overall, the clients are the most vulnerable among us and are as diverse as our nation, encompassing all races, ethnic groups and ages, including the working poor, veterans, homeowners and renters facing foreclosure or evictions, families with children, farmers, people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, the elderly and victims of natural disasters.

What kind of help is available?

LSC grantees provide a wide range of civil legal assistance to their clients and are committed to serving the most basic civil legal needs of the poor. The most frequent cases involve:

- **Family law:** LSC grantees continue to help victims of domestic violence by obtaining protective and restraining orders, helping parents obtain and keep custody of their children, helping family members obtain guardianship for children without parents, and other family law matters. As in prior years, nearly 38 percent of all cases closed by the local program are family law cases.
- **Housing & Foreclosure Cases:** More than 25 percent of cases involve helping to resolve landlord-tenant disputes, helping homeowners prevent foreclosures or renegotiate their loans, assisting renters with eviction notices whose landlords are being foreclosed on, and helping people maintain federal housing subsidies when appropriate.
- **Consumer Issues:** Nearly 12 percent of cases involve protecting the elderly and other vulnerable groups from being victimized by unscrupulous lenders, helping people file for bankruptcy when appropriate and helping people manage their debts.
- **Income Maintenance:** Approximately 11 percent of cases involved helping working Americans obtain promised compensation from private employers, helping people obtain and retain government benefits such as disability benefits to which they are entitled.

How many are helped?

Nearly 51 million people—including 19.7 million women and 17.6 million children—are eligible for LSC-funded services. LSC-funded programs close nearly 1 million cases per year nationwide. The clients served are at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level threshold, an income of \$27,563 a year for a family of four.

The Growing Justice Gap

An overwhelming unmet demand exists for civil legal services. In 2005, LSC's Justice Gap Report, the Corporation's first comprehensive national statistical study, established that for every client who received service, one eligible applicant was turned away. Fifty percent of eligible potential clients requesting assistance from LSC grantees were turned away for lack of adequate program resources. The findings understate the need, because LSC did not count persons who do not contact a program either because they are unaware they have a legal program, or they do not know that the program can help them. With the current recession and economic downturn, even more people will be eligible for LSC-funded services. At a time when poor Americans are struggling to keep their jobs, homes and basic necessities for their families, it is crucial for the federal government to address the civil legal needs of these vulnerable people as a national priority.