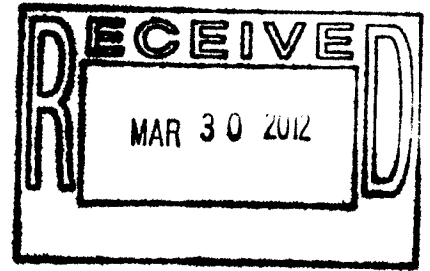


WENDY HINTON VAUGHN



March 29, 2012

Mattie Cohan, Senior Assistant General Counsel
Office of Legal Affairs
Legal Services Corporation
3333 K Street NW.
Washington DC 20007

Re: Proposed Amendments to Legal Services Corporation's Regulations on Termination
Procedures, Enforcement, and Suspension Procedures
45 CFR Parts 1606, 1618, and 1623

Dear Ms. Cohan:

My name is Wendy Hinton Vaughn. I am the President of the Board of Directors of Prairie State Legal Services. I am writing to voice my deep concern over the recently proposed amendments which would authorize the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) to impose additional or "lesser" sanctions on LSC-funded programs. I am deeply concerned that these sanctions could cause serious harm to the very clients whom LSC exists to serve.

The description of these sanctions by LSC as being less onerous than existing tools at LSC's disposal is inaccurate and fails to adequately acknowledge the harm to clients that these sanctions will cause. These sanctions are very significant and could severely impact the operations of a grantee organization and would, in fact, cause a serious disruption to the delivery of clients' services. In the case of Prairie State Legal Services, 5% of our LSC grant is equivalent to \$130,000. Because of declining LSC and IOLTA funding, Prairie State Legal Services is quickly depleting its reserves. As a result, a funding reduction of this magnitude would require that we immediately lay off two or possibly three attorneys. Without question, we would be forced to deny services to many eligible clients. Furthermore, because such a reduction could be imposed with very little warning, we would have great difficulty fulfilling our obligations to those clients we have already accepted.


The proposed amendments do not provide adequate due process for programs to respond to the sanction or for LSC to complete a thorough and fair investigation. While of course there could be circumstances in which LSC must have the ability to impose sanctions upon a program that is in serious breach of the governing regulations, it is important that such measures be used sparingly and only after a thorough evaluation of the facts. Under the proposed amendment, a grantee is only provided an opportunity to request an informal meeting with LSC within 5 business days and to submit additional documents within 10 business days. This is clearly insufficient due process considering the potential magnitude of the penalty.

Furthermore, the proposed amendments fail to set forth adequate standards to guide the determination of whether sanctions will be imposed. While the proposed rule sets forth a number of factors to be considered in determining whether a substantial violation has occurred, the proposal lacks standards that set reasonable bounds on the discretion of LSC. The proposal lacks clarity as to which alleged violations are considered more serious, and does not limit imposition of sanctions to only willful violations.

LSC exists to direct funding to grantees to enable them to provide desperately needed legal assistance to low income clients. The proposed penalties could very well result in staff layoffs and a reduction in services, which would directly harm clients and potential clients. The imposition of such sanctions without meaningful standards and adequate due process would not achieve justice, and is contrary to the very principles for which LSC stands. For the foregoing reasons, I urge LSC reformulate the proposed rule to clearly define the circumstances under which sanctions could be imposed, and to insure that adequate due process protections are afforded prior to the imposition of sanctions.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



Wendy Hinton Vaughn
President, Board of Directors
Prairie State Legal Services