



National Center for Lesbian Rights

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To the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

Fiscal Year 2019 Appropriations for the Legal Services Corporation

The National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) writes 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 \$564,800,000 for Fiscal Year 2019.**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 134 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 mothers who have been impacted by domestic violence. In 2016, LSC grantees closed 736,404 cases, of which over 70% involved women, more than 50% involved people of color, and 18% involved people aged 60 or older.² In total, LSC grantees served nearly 1.8 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 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), will continue to be unable to seek justice.

NCLR is an organization committed to advancing the civil and human rights of LGBT persons and their families through litigation, legislation, policy, and public education. Because LGBT people face a higher rate of poverty than do non-LGBT people,⁶ NCLR is devoted to protecting access to civil legal services for low-income people. In a report on the legal needs of low-income LGBT 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

¹ Legal Services Corporation, *Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Request*, <https://www.lsc.gov/media-center/publications/fiscal-year-2019-budget-request>.

² Legal Services Corporation, *LSC by the Numbers: The Data Underlying Legal Aid Programs (2016)* (2017), <https://www.lsc.gov/media-center/publications/2016-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.*

⁶ Brad Sears & Lee Badgett, *Beyond Stereotypes: Poverty in the LGBT Community* (June 2012), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/williams-in-the-news/beyond-stereotypes-poverty-in-the-lgbt-community/>.

law practice area.”⁷ The civil legal needs of LGBT people are only made worse by anti-LGBT discrimination, harassment, and violence. Maintaining funding for LSC is crucial to ensuring that vulnerable communities – including LGBT people – have equal access to justice.

While NCLR currently serves over 1,500 LGBT individuals each year who are low-income and are seeking help with civil and immigration legal matters, we and other LGBT legal organizations cannot make up for insufficient LSC funding.

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.⁸ Congress can uphold these values by funding the Legal Services Corporation at \$564,800,000 for Fiscal Year 2019, which would allow it to better address the urgent legal needs of low-income people.

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 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.