



CONGRESSMAN ALAN B. MOLLOHAN, CHAIRMAN

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE & RELATED AGENCIES

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Opening Statement of Chairman Alan B. Mollohan
Legal Services Corporation

Good morning. The Subcommittee would like to welcome Helaine Barnett, President of the Legal Services Corporation, and Lillian BeVier, Vice Chairman of the LSC Board, to discuss civil legal aid for the low income community. We are pleased to have you both, and we thank you for your time.

We are fortunate to have already seen your fiscal year 2010 budget request, which many other agencies won't be delivering until later this spring. That means that this hearing will be able to address both thematic and budgetary issues, and there is plenty of ground to cover.

Your budget request proposes a funding level of \$485 million, which is nearly a \$100 million increase over fiscal year 2009. Although the President's Budget will propose a smaller increase, this is the first time in many years that LSC and the Administration have both agreed that additional funds for legal services are needed. I certainly share that sentiment and, in fact, believe that it couldn't be more timely.

The ongoing recession is driving more and more Americans below the poverty thresholds that establish eligibility for legal aid services. This growing population of eligible clients is confronted with legal needs that are increasing in both number and complexity. Many clients face the prospect of foreclosure or foreclosure-related eviction. With job losses increasing, there are more clients needing assistance gaining access to food stamp benefits, unemployment compensation or Medicaid services. There is also substantial evidence that economic distress increases family distress, including divorce and domestic violence.

All of these factors are driving up demand for legal aid services at precisely the same time that the supply of those services is dwindling. Legal aid providers across the country have been forced to make significant budget cuts due to state government deficits and diminishing charitable and private support. For many legal aid programs, federal assistance through this bill is the only thing that will keep them going.

This morning's hearing will give us an opportunity to examine these issues in more detail. We will look at how LSC and its partner service providers around the country are both impacted by and responding to the current financial crisis. Within that context, we will discuss your proposed budget and your ideas for how you can make the best and most responsible use of those funds.

Before we invite you to begin with your prepared remarks, I would like to turn to our Ranking Member, Mr. Wolf, for his opening statement.