

Missouri Legal Services

Legal aid programs providing free legal help to the low-income and disadvantaged in Missouri



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Law Day 2019 - Statement of John G. Levi, Chair, LSC

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April 30, 2019

In 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower designated May 1 as Law Day, establishing what has become our nation's annual celebration of the rule of law. Access to justice is a central principle of the rule of law and a core American value, as Eisenhower recognized when he called on Americans to "vigilantly guard the great heritage of liberty, justice, and equality under law which our forefathers bequeathed to us." Failing to provide such access to justice breaks faith with our founding values and undermines our confidence in the fairness of our justice system.

The Legal Services Corporation was founded in 1974 to make sure that does not happen by working to provide "equal access to the system of justice" and "high quality legal assistance to those who would be otherwise unable to afford adequate legal counsel." For 45 years, LSC and its grantees have provided critical legal assistance to low-income Americans in matters that go to the very heart of their safety, security, and health, including domestic violence, evictions and unlawful foreclosures, recovery from disasters, predatory lending, child custody, and veterans' rights and benefits.

Despite chronic underfunding that has forced many of our grantees to turn away nearly three-quarters of those seeking assistance, LSC has pursued this mission, which is vital to our democracy. As Thomas Jefferson observed, "the most sacred of the duties of government is to do equal and impartial justice to all its citizens."

On this Law Day 2019, we ask our fellow citizens to help address this "justice gap"—the disparity between the need for and availability of civil legal services—and keep faith with our core values by making our civil justice system more accessible to all Americans.

Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is an independent nonprofit established by Congress in 1974 to provide financial support for civil legal aid to low-income Americans. The Corporation currently provides funding to the four legal aid programs in Missouri.

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