

Law Day 2012, Statement of John G. Levi, Chairman, Board of Directors, Legal Services Corporation

Washington, DC -- On May 1, Americans celebrate Law Day, which President Dwight D. Eisenhower established in 1958 as "a day of national dedication to the principle of government under law."

The theme for this year's observance, *No Courts No Justice No Freedom*, reminds us that the rule of law is the foundation for a free and just society. It also speaks to the core mission of the Legal Services Corporation—promoting equal access to justice and ensuring the delivery of high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income Americans.

At a time when more and more Americans are slipping into poverty, this mission has never been more critical. In fact, nearly 1 in 5 Americans—63 million people—now qualify for LSC-funded civil legal assistance, because they live at or below 125% of the federal poverty guideline. That is an all-time high.

>As demand has been rising, the combined funding for LSC programs from federal, IOLTA, state, local and all other sources has dropped from \$960 million in 2010 to \$878 million in 2012. The major contributing factor in this significant funding reduction is that Congress cut its LSC appropriation from \$420 million in 2010 to \$348 million in 2012--the lowest funding ever, in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Not surprisingly, the combination of increased demand and diminished funding has reduced LSC's ability to meet the civil legal assistance needs of low-income Americans. Recent studies have shown that LSC-funded services are forced to turn away 50 to 80 percent of those seeking help because of inadequate resources

On this Law Day, we call on Americans to address this widening "justice gap"-- the disparity between the need for and availability of civil legal services. If this gap is not closed, millions of Americans will indeed face no courts, no justice, no freedom.

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