



National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA  
*Office of the General Secretary*

November 29, 2005

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and Commerce  
Committee on Appropriations  
241 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-4610

The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and Commerce  
Committee on Appropriations  
2302 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-4801

Dear Chairman Wolf and Congressman Mollohan:

As faith-based organizations serving low-income communities, we write today to voice our concern about a federal appropriations law that interferes with privately financed activities of deep importance to our country's most vulnerable families.

The law – a restriction annually accompanying federal funding distributed by the Legal Services Corporation – limits the work that independent civil legal aid programs can do with their own funds that they raise from private, state and local sources. We are deeply concerned that this “private money restriction,” which encumbers more than \$300 million in non-federal funds each year, hurts the families we serve, imposes unnecessary costs, and sets a dangerous precedent for public-private partnerships.

The law closes the doors of justice for many low-income individuals and families who simply cannot afford to hire a private lawyer to help them in civil matters. Our organizations need to rely on local legal aid programs to help people in difficult circumstances resolve problems that can otherwise undermine and even destroy their lives. A legal aid advocate is often a lifeline for low-income families, victims of domestic violence, the elderly and the disabled. We are particularly concerned about the law's effect in denying basic legal assistance to immigrant communities and to all people who are incarcerated.

We understand that LSC has applied the private money restriction by requiring nonprofits that wish to spend their own funds on restricted categories of advocacy to first establish a physically separate office – with separate staff, office space, and equipment. This compulsory physical separation imposes unnecessary costs on financially strapped legal aid programs and creates costly obstacles to private philanthropy.

We are also concerned that this physical separation model establishes a dangerous precedent, more generally, for a range of public-private partnerships. Currently, recipients of federal funds under the Faith-Based Initiative and Charitable Choice programs – like virtually all other federal grantees – are free to use non-federal, privately raised funds to finance a broad range of activities without stringent restrictions like those imposed on LSC grantees. But we are mindful that if the physical separation model for legal aid is imported into faith-based settings (as may occur if the government continues to defend this model in litigation and policy debates), the result would likely undermine our efforts to foster partnerships between faith-based organizations and government to deliver services to low-income communities.

We greatly appreciate your support for civil legal aid and for its important role in enabling thousands of low-income families nationwide to resolve disputes and move forward with their lives. The core values of our faiths teach us to care for society's most vulnerable members. The services provided by LSC recipient programs are vital for this purpose and should not be unwisely restricted. Please continue your leadership on behalf of America's families by removing the LSC private money restriction.

Sincerely,

National Council of Churches of  
Christ in the USA  
Rev. Eileen W. Lindner, PhD  
Deputy General Secretary of  
Research and Planning  
*New York, New York*

Pax Christi USA  
*Erie, Pennsylvania*

National Baptist Convention, USA  
Reverend Dr. William Shaw, President  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Forever Crowned Ministries  
*Wichita, Kansas*

Evangelicals for Social Action  
Dr. Ronald J. Sider, President  
*Wynnewood, Pennsylvania*

Latino Leadership Foundation  
*Chicago, Illinois*

Exodus Transitional Community, Inc.  
*New York, New York*

Metropolitan Area Church Council  
of Columbus  
*Columbus, Ohio*

Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy  
*Richmond, Virginia*

Baptist General Convention of Texas  
*Dallas, Texas*

New Jersey Catholic Conference  
*Trenton, New Jersey*

Reverend Guillermo Marquez-Sterling  
Coral Gables Congregational Church  
*Coral Gables, Florida*

Reverend Dr. William H. Gray III  
Pastor of Bright Hope Baptist Church  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Heartsong Hermitage  
*Alberta, Virginia*

Austin Interfaith  
*Austin, Texas*

New Jersey Council of Churches  
*Trenton, New Jersey*

Catholics for Faithful Citizenship  
*Columbus, Ohio*

Tulsa Ten-Point Coalition  
*Tulsa, Oklahoma*

Bet Tzedek Legal Services  
*Los Angeles, California*

Lutheran Office of Governmental  
Ministry in New Jersey  
*Trenton, New Jersey*

MUST Marietta/MUST Housing  
(Ministries United for Service Training)  
*Marietta, Georgia*

High Impact Leadership Coalition  
*College Park, Maryland*

Catholic Social Services  
*Anchorage, Alaska*

New City Kids Church  
*Jersey City, New Jersey*

Victory Center Ministries  
*Clinton, Iowa*

Interfaith Legal Services  
*Columbus, Ohio*

Abe Brown Ministries  
*Tampa, Florida*

Mississippi C.U.R.E. (Citizens United for  
Rehabilitation of Errants)  
*Philadelphia, Mississippi*

Homeless Coalition of  
Hillsborough County  
*Tampa, Florida*

Alfred Santino  
Director, Holistic Ministry Team  
Christian Reformed Church  
Classes Hudson - Hackensack  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  
*New York, New York*

Reverend Ken Vander Wall  
Campus Pastor of Varsity Christian  
Fellowship  
*North Haledon, New Jersey*