

Exploring Legal Aid Problems, Solutions at White House and Judicial Forums

Throughout 2012, LSC grantees struggled with the twin challenges of a rapidly growing poverty population and dramatically lower resources. The LSC board focused attention on these challenges and explored strategies to address them at a high-profile event at the White House and at forums convened in conjunction with its quarterly board meetings.

The two-hour White House forum in April focused on the state of civil legal assistance in America and featured a spirited discussion by a diverse group of national leaders.

In his remarks at the gathering, President Obama said that making civil legal assistance available to low-income Americans is “central to our notion of equal justice under the law” and pledged to be a “fierce defender and advocate for legal services.”

Other speakers included U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, U.S. Department of State Legal Adviser Harold Hongju Koh, and Senior Adviser to the President Valerie Jarrett.

A panel discussion on the challenges facing civil legal assistance, moderated by Harvard Law School Dean Martha Minow, featured former Pennsylvania Governor and U.S. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh; Deputy Chief of Staff to the President Mark Childress; Justice Jess H. Dickinson of the Mississippi Supreme Court; Department of Veterans Affairs General Counsel Will A. Gunn; White House Counsel Kathryn Ruemmler; Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan; and American Bar Association President William T. Robinson.



President Barack Obama

LSC President Jim Sandman moderated a second panel that day of executive directors of LSC-funded programs. They discussed the state of civil legal services in their communities, and how they use partnerships with pro bono attorneys, technology, and other innovations to leverage scarce resources.

At its July meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the LSC board convened another distinguished panel of judicial leaders, including Judge Denise Page Hood of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, together with state Chief Justices Mark Cady of Iowa, Cornelia Clark of Tennessee, Thomas Kilbride of Illinois, and Richard Teitelman of Missouri.

The panelists discussed how, in a climate of eroding resources, their courts are attempting to address issues such as language access for non-English-speaking individuals and providing support to help pro se litigants navigate the court system. They also talked about the importance of collaboration among equal justice stakeholders seeking to increase resources and bring about necessary change.

Two other panels followed—one composed of domestic violence law experts from around the country, and a second made up of Michigan equal justice community leaders.

The alarming growth in the number of pro se litigants was among the topics addressed by six leading judges from the Southeast at a forum held Oct. 1 at Duke University. The panelists also discussed ways to expand access to justice for low-income Americans by

For videos and photographs of the White House event, and links to speech transcripts: www.lsc.gov/media/in-the-spotlight/white-house-and-lsc-co-host-forum

A SUMMONS TO THE WHITE HOUSE

“The phone call came during a board meeting. The president of the Legal Services Corp. urged that I leave the meeting and call back. ‘It’s important. We want you to come to the White House and talk about what you do,’ he said. Really?... The opportunity to tell the President of the United States why we think



our work is important was unprecedented. It was a chance to speak at the highest level of our government about the cause to which I have devoted my career: justice for all.”

Phyllis Holmen
Georgia Legal Services Executive Director
Daily Report, April 26, 2012



“The United States is the richest country in the world. Thus, most Americans simply assume that we rank at the top on every empirical rule of law measure. In fact, and shockingly, we do not.”—Harold Hongju Koh, Legal Adviser, U.S. Department of State

simplifying legal processes and forms, increasing the use of law students and legal clinics, and promoting pro bono service.

The panel included Judge Allyson Duncan of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit; Chief Judge John C. Few of the South Carolina Court of Appeals;

Justice S. Bernard Goodwyn of the Virginia Supreme Court; Chief Justice Carol Hunstein of Georgia; Chief Justice Menis Ketchum of West Virginia; and Chief Justice Sarah Parker of North Carolina.

The forum also featured a panel on the civil legal needs of military veterans.



“Today’s forum represents an important step forward in our ongoing efforts to close what’s become known as the ‘justice gap,’ to secure civil legal aid for all those who need it, and to bolster the strength and integrity of our nation’s justice system.”—U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder

For video of the Ann Arbor and Durham forms: www.lsc.gov/media/videos / For photos: www.lsc.gov/media/photo-galleries

At the White House Forum: (L-R) Former U.S. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, White House Counsel Kathryn Ruemmler, General Counsel Will Gunn of the Department of Veterans Affairs, LSC Board Vice Chair Martha Minow (moderator), Justice Jess H. Dickinson of Mississippi, ABA President William T. Robinson, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, and Deputy Chief of Staff to the President Mark Childress.



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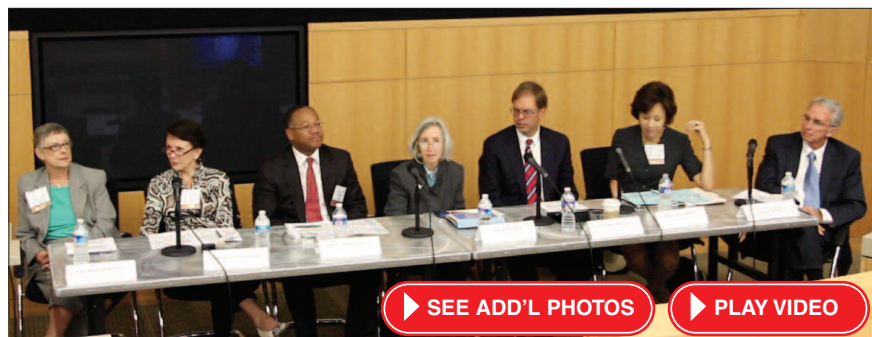
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A judicial panel convened by LSC in Ann Arbor, Mich., included (L-R) Hon. Denise Page Hood of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Chief Justice Thomas Kilbride of Illinois, LSC Board Vice Chair Martha Minow (moderator), Chief Justice Mark Cady of Iowa, Chief Justice Cornelia Clark of Tennessee, and Chief Justice Richard Teitelman of Missouri.

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A judicial panel convened by LSC in Durham, N.C., included (L-R) Chief Justice Sarah Parker of North Carolina, Chief Justice Carol Hunstein of Georgia, Justice S. Bernard Goodwyn of Virginia, LSC Board Vice Chair Martha Minow (moderator), Chief Judge John C. Few of the South Carolina Court of Appeals, Judge Allyson Duncan of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit, and Chief Justice Menis Ketchum of West Virginia.



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