



Providing Help.
Creating Hope.

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June 22, 2005

Catholic Charities USA is the nation's largest, private network of social service organizations, with 1,400 local agencies and institutions providing essential services to over 7 million people annually, regardless of their religious, racial, ethnic, or economic background. On behalf of Catholic Charities USA, I urge you to support both adequate funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) and an amendment to allow LSC grantees to represent battered women immigrants.

Episcopal Liaison
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MSW, DD
Bishop of Boise

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MSW

Legal services programs help low-income people with legal problems in housing, healthcare, public benefits, consumer disputes, financial, employment, and immigration. Local Catholic Charities agencies and institutions rely on local legal services programs to help their clients avoid and resolve their legal problems. The LSC insures the promise of our Constitution of *equal justice under law* for millions of low-income Americans. Locally governed legal services programs provide lawyers to aid victims of domestic violence, challenge unlawful evictions that would render families homeless, and help low income, elderly and disabled people obtain access to healthcare and public benefits.

We understand that an appropriation of at least \$363.8 million is necessary to maintain the current level of services. I ask for your support for that amount.

In addition, I ask your assistance in securing approval of an amendment that would lift the funding restrictions that currently prohibit LSC-funded agencies from providing legal assistance to many immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and trafficking. Currently, these vulnerable immigrant women and children must be turned away from critical legal services if they are not married to their abusers.

Here is a story of a victim in New Mexico, in desperate need of legal services, turned away because of LSC funding prohibitions:

Marta, an unmarried and undocumented immigrant, was in a two year relationship with Javier, father of her one year old son. During the course of their relationship, Javier became increasingly violent, and Marta decided to end the relationship.

Although Marta filed for a temporary order of protection, Javier continued to stalk her before the hearing. While Javier was represented by a lawyer, Marta was not eligible for an LSC-funded attorney because she is undocumented and not married to her abuser. She does not make enough money to hire an attorney. Marta, alone and intimidated by the process, could not get the help she needed.

Unprotected by the law, Marta turned to her family for help, which resulted in a fatal assault on her father by Javier. He was arrested immediately, but was soon let out on bond while awaiting trial.

Perhaps legal representation on behalf of Marta might have made the difference on whether she felt safe enough to go through with getting the order of protection.

Catholic Charities agencies provide housing, food and social services but we are not equipped to provide the legal services that clients need. LSC- funded programs, which are essential to ensuring even a semblance of justice on civil matters to low income people, should be adequately funded and permitted to serve the clients, including battered immigrant women, who need them.

I hope we can count on your support for the necessary amendments to the Commerce, State, Justice, and Judiciary Appropriation bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Larry Snyder".

Fr. Larry Snyder
President, Catholic Charities USA