

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

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D.C. ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION FOR DISTRICT FUNDING OF LEGAL SERVICES GETS WIDESPREAD SUPPORT

This week, the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission submitted letters signed by an array of social and legal services groups, coalitions representing over 100 organizations, the D.C. Catholic Conference, and 25 former Presidents of the D.C. Bar to Mayor Williams, City Council Chair Linda Cropp, and Judiciary Committee Chair Phil Mendelson supporting the Commission's recommendation that the District government budget \$6.2 million in fiscal year 2007 for civil legal services. Coalitions signing the letters of support include the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition, Coalition of Homeless and Housing Organizations, D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, D.C. Consortium of Legal Services Providers, D.C. Language Access Coalition, and the Fair Budget Coalition. These letters follow endorsements made in recent weeks by the Washington Post and the Council for Court Excellence.

The Commission's funding recommendation would provide for additional legal services lawyers to work on housing-related matters, place more lawyers in underserved areas of the City to serve people in poverty, and create a shared legal interpreter bank so that District residents who do not speak English well can access the justice system on the same terms as everyone else.

"The Commission's recommendation is a cost-effective way to serve thousands of low-income District residents as they face legal issues that have a critical impact on their daily lives," stated Commission Chair Professor Peter Edelman. "The support expressed by the broad cross-section of organizations that serve residents living in poverty, the D.C. Catholic Conference, and the past Presidents of the D.C. Bar is a testament to the importance of providing civil legal services to those in need."

The Commission was created by the D.C. Court of Appeals in 2005 to address low and moderate income residents' unmet need for civil legal services. The Commission includes D.C. Court of Appeals and Superior Court Judges, past Presidents of the D.C. Bar, Executive Directors of three leading legal services providers, and other community leaders. For further information, please contact the Commission's Executive Director, Sunil Mansukhani, at 202-344-4441 or Sunil.Mansukhani@dcaccesstojustice.org.

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