

\$700,000. The fund total was reduced to \$700,000 for a period of two years, ending with fiscal year 2009–2010. The fund will be increased to \$750,000, beginning in fiscal year 2010–2011. CSF acts as a “last resort” source to reimburse losses of persons victimized by attorney defalcation or misconduct.

Finally, with the expiration of the Bar’s 16-year lease, the occupancy costs will increase significantly. The Bar will commence a new 12-year lease in May at 1101 K Street NW.

Spagnoletti, Edelman Testify on Funding for Civil Legal Services

D.C. Bar President Robert J. Spagnoletti and District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission chair Peter Edelman went before the Council of the District of Columbia’s Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary on March 26 to testify about proposed city budget cuts to civil legal services funding.

D.C. Mayor Adrian M. Fenty’s proposed fiscal year 2010 Budget Request Act allocated \$2.9 million for civil legal services (including \$315,000 for the Poverty Lawyer Loan Assistance Repayment Program); this is close to \$700,000 less than what was allocated in fiscal year 2009.

Spagnoletti and Edelman told committee chair Phil Mendelson that they realize the District is facing budget challenges, and that they requested only a 4 percent reduction from the 2009 allocation of \$3.6 million, which is the level of cuts in the budget overall.

“At a time when requests for services are increasing due to the recession, thereby further straining resources, any additional cuts would have profound consequences on many fronts,” Spagnoletti said.

Spagnoletti said decreased funding would result in the layoff of civil legal services staff attorneys, which would, in turn, result in fewer services by pro bono lawyers who depend on staff attorneys for structuring pro bono opportunities and for training and mentoring. (Spagnoletti was able to make public statements about funding civil legal services because of a resolution previously approved by D.C. Bar members.)

He said these cuts come on top of those that legal services providers are already enduring in IOLTA and other funding and would result in the loss of numerous staff attorneys.

Inez Smith Reid, commission vice chair and a judge with the D.C. Court of Appeals, testified on behalf of Court

of Appeals Chief Judge Eric T. Washington. In testimony she said the funded civil legal services are “vital to unrepresented litigants who are here in the D.C. courts every day.”

The Access to Justice Commission was created by the D.C. Court of Appeals for an initial three-year term in 2005 to address the unmet civil legal needs of low- and moderate-income District residents. In late 2007 the Court of Appeals ordered the continuation of the commission without a fixed termination date.

Among the commission’s successes has been securing funding from the D.C. Council for civil legal services—\$3.2 million in 2006 and 2007, \$3.6 million in 2008 and 2009.

Edelman, who is also a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, testified that the city’s funding has allowed for the hiring of additional legal services provider staff attorneys and for the D.C. Bar Foundation to make grants to 13 organizations to work on 15 different projects.

He said that many of the gains that came out of this funding would be lost if the proposed budget cuts were made.

Spagnoletti and Edelman also spoke out against a proposal in the fiscal year 2010 Budget Support Act that includes language that would add restrictions on the use of public funding and require the Bar Foundation and its grantees to provide documentation on individual matters handled by publicly funded legal services providers that involve litigation against the District of Columbia.—*K.A.*