

**Public Hearing on Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request**

**Before the Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety**

**Testimony of Nancy E. Drane, Executive Director  
District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission**

**April 4, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony today on behalf of the D.C. Access to Justice Commission. As you know, the Commission was created by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals in 2005 to address the scarcity of civil legal services for low- and moderate-income District residents and to reduce the barriers these litigants face in navigating the civil justice system. The Commission is chaired by Professor Peter B. Edelman of Georgetown University Law Center and its members include D.C. Court of Appeals and Superior Court judges, past Presidents of the D.C. Bar, Executive Directors of legal services providers, members of the private bar, corporate counsel, law school professors, and other community leaders.

It is my honor to testify today in support of the Access to Justice Initiative, which is under the purview of the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG). OVSJG, led by Director Michelle Garcia, has worked with the D.C. Bar Foundation (DCBF) to skillfully and strategically administer these important funds. I am pleased to testify today alongside Kirra Jarratt, DCBF's Executive Director. I am also pleased that Nancy Lopez, Executive Director of the Washington Council of Lawyers (WCL), is here today to testify in support of the Initiative. WCL has a decades-long commitment to promoting the public interest and bringing together the District's legal community to advance access to justice and shrink the justice gap in our city. Finally, I know that you will hear today from a number of legal services providers who directly receive support from the Access to Justice Initiative. We have a strong, dedicated, and talented legal services community. Together, they are all great partners in this important work.

Attached to this testimony you will also find two statements of support; one joint statement from Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals and Chief Judge Robert Morin of the Superior Court for the District of Columbia; and the other from D.C. Bar President Esther Lim.

The Commission is extremely grateful to the Mayor and to the D.C. Council for their long-standing support of the Access to Justice Initiative. We appreciate that the Mayor's proposed fiscal year 2020 budget provides for \$9.939 million in funding. Those funds will be well utilized to support important justice programs. However, we are seeking your support today in increasing that funding level.

First, the Mayor's proposed fiscal year 2020 budget represents a roughly \$118,000 decrease from FY 2019 funding. We seek your support for restoring those funds to ensure the continuity of existing programs, since the funds are used almost exclusively to support staffing costs. Second, we seek your support for an additional increase of \$1 million. This increase will allow the Access to Justice Grants program to keep pace with the growing community need for a broad array of civil legal services, as detailed below. Our total funding request for the Access to Justice Initiative is \$11.057 million.<sup>1</sup>

Our testimony will focus on the role these public funds play in the efforts of the civil legal services network to meet the needs of the District's low-income community and how they enable our legal services network to best leverage pro bono and other support.

### **The Role of Public Funds in Addressing Access to Justice in the District**

For over twelve years, since fiscal year 2007, the District government has recognized that it should play a role in providing vital financial support to the network of civil legal services organizations that serve low-income District residents. That support has been provided through the Access to Justice Initiative, which is comprised of three programs: The *Access to Justice Grants Program* is designed to increase services in communities and neighborhoods of highly concentrated poverty, expand representation in housing matters, address traditionally underserved populations, and maintain a community legal interpreter bank. The *Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program* adds to this important work by targeting the provision of legal services in eviction-related proceedings – an area of practice where we see some of the highest

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<sup>1</sup> We are seeking a total of \$11,057,000 for the Access to Justice Initiative in the FY 2020 budget – \$6,257,000 of those funds would go to the Access to Justice Grants Program (an increase of \$1,082,000 from FY 2019); \$300,000 would go to the District of Columbia Poverty Lawyers Loan Repayment Program (a decrease of \$82,000 from FY 2019); and \$4,500,000 would go to the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (level funding from FY 2019). Taken together, these complementary programs represent an integrated and cohesive investment in access to justice.

rates of lack of representation with some of the most significant life consequences. The funds also support the *District of Columbia Poverty Lawyer Loan Repayment Assistance Program*, which helps lawyers continue to work and live in the District through loan repayment assistance.

*Imagine being a single, unemployed mother just emerging from a relationship with a man who became physically, verbally, and financially abusive. As part of the financial abuse, he opened credit cards in her name, and even went so far as to file an income tax return in her name in order to receive a tax refund. She filed a joint complaint with the Internal Revenue Service and the Federal Trade Commission in the hopes of resolving the issues. As she worked to get herself and her family back on track, she enrolled in a job training program. It was only then that she learned that she was being sued by a third-party debt collector for over \$900 on a credit card her ex-partner had opened in her name.*

Here, it is a lawyer's skills that can help address these potentially devastating events. A lawyer can successfully persuade the debt collector to dismiss the suit and erase the entire amount owed or, if needed, defend a case in court. This will allow her and her family to continue on a road to stability.

Since its inception, the civil legal aid provided through the Access to Justice Initiative has provided critical support to vulnerable District residents like the one described above who have traditionally struggled to access services: keeping children in safe homes and receiving appropriate educational services; safeguarding elders' access to needed services and protections; assisting returning citizens with community reentry; and ensuring that LGBTQ District residents have equal access to healthcare and other essential services. In the area of housing, legal services providers: keep District families stable in their homes; preserve their access to affordable housing; assist those facing wrongful evictions or foreclosures; and help those living in unsafe housing cure housing code violations. In addition, work done in the areas of employment, health and disability, and consumer law, protect and safeguard District residents otherwise vulnerable to discrimination, fraud, and other unlawful practices. Here are just a few examples of the important work being done with the help of Access to Justice Initiative funding:

- Low-income District workers recover stolen wages, fight discrimination, and ensure they receive their lawful wages through an employment justice project that hosts clinics, conducts outreach, provides rights training, and represents individual clients;

- Homebound elders in need of wills, advance directives, and public benefits audits, as well as those affected by consumer scams and housing-related issues, receive necessary legal assistance;
- Significant housing barriers faced by people with disabilities, especially people with mental illness, are addressed through a program that uses systemic and individual advocacy to obtain reasonable accommodations by housing and service providers;
- Low-income and limited-English proficient Asian-Americans in the District living in Section 8 housing receive legal assistance regarding evictions, threats, illegal rent increases, and bad housing conditions, as well as illegal relocation, denial of access to housing applications, and lack of language access; and
- Victims of fraudulent acts by representatives purporting to serve the immigrant community, often known as ‘notarios’ or ‘immigration consultants,’ receive advice, counsel and representation respecting immigration, civil and criminal processes.

The Access to Justice Initiative also supports the nationally-recognized Community Legal Interpreter Bank, which ensures that the District’s large deaf community and more than 39,000 limited English proficient residents have equal access to justice. The Bank provides language access services to nearly 40 District nonprofits that provide legal assistance to low-income residents. The Bank now has over 120 specially trained interpreters available to provide services in 26 different languages (including American Sign Language and Certified Deaf Interpreters), and in 2018 provided 2,513 telephonic interpretations, 301 in-person interpretations, and 274 document translations. At a time of constant and erratic change in immigration policy, the Community Legal Interpreter Bank has been an indispensable resource for nonprofits serving and educating limited English proficient immigrants.

As you know, the Commission is in the midst of finalizing a report on civil legal needs in the District. Through this effort, we’ve had an opportunity to look more closely at the work that has been accomplished by the legal services network over the last ten years. Without question, these advances would not have been possible without the funding provided through the Access to Justice Initiative.

In addition to the ability to grow existing programs, the funds have allowed for the creation of new organizations and projects that address unmet and newly emerging needs. For example, the District is home to one of the largest transgender populations in the nation. A D.C.-based medical provider has increased its provision of medical care to the transgender community by more than 600% from 2012 to 2018, serving more than 1,200 transgender patients each year. Through its medical-legal partnership, it has created one of the nation’s first

free and comprehensive name and gender change clinics. The clinic reaches on average 145 transgender clients annually to update or obtain accurate identity documents. The provider has combined this legal service with broader advocacy on system changes required to meet the unique needs of these District residents. Nearly all legal service providers in D.C. now collect gender identity data from clients and strive to meet the unique needs of this population.

Providers have also adopted diverse and creative practice models to address the barriers that clients experience in seeking assistance. These changes to service provision models include increasing accessibility of legal services by making them more convenient to clients through such programs as neighborhood offices and community clinics. Since its inception, the Access to Justice Initiative has doubled the number of attorneys working east of the Anacostia River, easing the transportation burden for clients. As organizations develop neighborhood legal services offices, they have become known and trusted parts of the safety net in those communities. The funds promote creative community collaborations such as medical-legal partnerships, which place attorneys alongside medical staff at some of the District's most high-volume providers of primary medical care in Northeast and Southeast D.C. Almost all of the major legal services organizations have a presence in our communities of greatest need, a true testament to this initiative.

Providers have also entered into unique collaborations with an expansive range of partners, including community-based organizations and the courts. For example, an organization supported by the Access to Justice Initiative conducts community outreach on debt-related legal matters by partnering with the United Planning Organization in Ward 7. Many also have begun engaging clients directly and strategically in a variety of initiatives to ensure that legal services are aligned with the priorities identified by those needing them. These funds also support important collaborations between the courts and the legal services community to address unmet needs identified by both the judiciary and legal services providers. The funds support court-based projects in debt collection, domestic violence, child support, foreclosure, and housing conditions at D.C. Superior Court, and school discipline support at the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings. (The funds also support court-based eviction defense work, which will be addressed later in this testimony.)

Through the individual representation work supported by these funds, legal services providers are able to identify common or repeated issues faced by District residents. These observations inform the important work providers have done over the past ten years in systemic, policy, regulatory, and legislative advocacy. Legal services providers have played a critical role in promoting changes that enhance access to justice at the courts and other

adjudicative bodies, within District agencies, and in the community. Providers have partnered with the District and the Council on numerous efforts, bringing sound, thoughtful suggestions based on their daily experiences working with District residents. In this way, legal services providers can not only help their individual clients, but promote changes to systems and programs that will benefit all District residents.

The Commission is gratified that the District established the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program in fiscal year 2018 to support legal services organizations that provide eviction defense legal services to low-income tenants in the District. Through the program, these providers serve countless low-income District residents in either full representation, temporary appearances, brief service, or legal advice in landlord-tenant matters through same-day representation programs located at D.C. Superior Court and other related projects. The D.C. Bar Foundation has worked to successfully launch the program and bring together the eviction defense legal services community and other external stakeholders to promote collaboration and shared goals. District legal services organizations have expanded their staffs in housing-related matters, providing more comprehensive, holistic services, and are pursuing innovative collaborations that leverage each organization's expertise. The District's extraordinary commitment to investing and growing this work is particularly commendable.

Finally, and importantly, these funds support the D.C. Poverty Lawyer Loan Repayment Assistance Program, a critical tool for recruiting and maintaining a talented and diverse corps of legal services lawyers who live and work in the District. In fiscal year 2019, the D.C. Bar Foundation was able to provide support to every legal aid attorney who sought its help in making required annual payments on their educational debt. This support ensures that the District's civil legal aid community is stronger and more diverse, has greater continuity, and provides high quality services to District residents. As one legal services leader remarked: "The D.C. Bar Foundation's LRAP program has been critically important to our ability to recruit and retain diverse, well-qualified attorneys."

### **The Demand for these Funds**

While these public funds are being used effectively to serve thousands of District residents, we continue to hear from legal service providers that the demand for services, and the urgency of the problems faced by their clients, have not ebbed. Organizations are still forced to turn away clients with urgent, meritorious cases due to a lack of resources. As a result, the legal services network remains underfunded at a time when low-income residents,

particularly those who reside in Wards 7 and 8, continue to struggle with poverty-related legal problems.

In short, these public funds are absolutely essential to our civil justice system, and for this reason we are seeking a \$1 million increase to provide additional support to a broad range of civil legal services. In the listening sessions we conducted with legal services providers, we heard about this need in a variety of areas. Providers expressed a desire to expand the community collaborations that have already been made possible through the Access to Justice Grants Program. They remarked that establishing an even greater presence throughout the District will ensure that at-risk populations are aware of their legal rights and have access to legal information and assistance they need to protect their rights and their livelihoods – especially in areas like consumer and public benefits law. As you know, several years ago, the D.C. Consortium of Legal Services Providers produced *The Community Listening Project*, which contained a range of findings about the needs of District residents. One relevant finding was that District residents often fail to even recognize when there are legal solutions to a problem they are facing. Having a strong community presence will help District residents identify legal problems and give them the information to address them, with or without a lawyer.

Providers also noted the importance of being able to provide legal services where they are most needed. Family law practitioners, for example, suggested that the type of court-based same-day representation model that has been used so effectively in other areas of practice might benefit domestic relations practice – where over 80% of litigants still proceed without representation. Similarly, public benefits providers noted that having a greater presence at economic service centers, other community locations, and the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings would help District residents who are eligible for benefits actually secure and maintain them. These are just a few examples, in addition to the critical work already being done in the community.

Providers in every area voiced an interest in being able to serve more District residents, but several areas of law were identified as being especially in need of broader support. For example, providers noted that the D.C. Metro area has one of the highest numbers of fraud-related consumer complaints of any U.S. metropolitan area, and that the upturn in the housing market has brought about even more fraud and equity-stripping scams. One provider reported receiving 3-4 forged deed cases in just one two-week period, for example. Growing consumer-related practice could help address this need. Providers also reported a need to gain more support in an area like probate law, where there is significant overlap with consumer and housing law practice. Providers discussed the need for more lawyers to work on approaches to

preserve affordable housing to complement the eviction-defense practice already supported by public funding. Legal services that support an entire building as opposed to an individual tenant, for example, make a broader impact and preserve larger numbers of housing units. Finding the resources to assist all of the District residents who come to providers with family law matters is also a continuing challenge.

Finally, there is interest among legal services providers to bring important new approaches to the delivery of legal services. The D.C. Bar Foundation and legal services providers are focusing more on data collection and analysis – something the Council itself has supported through the Civil Legal Counsel Project Program. Providers are also interested in continuing and growing network-wide planning and looking at how the use of technology can improve service delivery - all of which require additional resources, financial and otherwise. The community has already seen collaboration and efficiency infused into the civil legal services network, and providers are interested in doing more to ensure that they are maximizing the impact of the public and private dollars spent.

These are just a few examples of areas where increased resources would help provide greater access to legal services.

### **The Broader Impact of these Funds**

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not recognize how important the District Government's leadership in supplying these public funds has been in allowing legal services organizations to maximize a range of other resources to magnify the impact of every public dollar spent, including pro bono service. Each year, the D.C. Courts, in partnership with the Commission and the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, recognize pro bono attorneys who provide 50 hours or more of pro bono service – or 100 hours of service or more for a higher recognition category – to help those who cannot afford counsel. In 2018, over 5,000 attorneys registered for the Honor Roll with almost 60% qualifying for the higher recognition category of 100 plus hours. The Honor Roll includes attorneys from all segments of the bar, including 168 law settings such as law firms, federal government agencies, and other organizations.

Pro bono contributions are indispensable to meeting client needs but are only possible when there is a stable legal services network to identify cases, develop resources, and provide training and supervision. Without these public funds and the stable legal services infrastructure they assure, many of these important law firm resources would go untapped, and thousands more clients would be denied the assistance of counsel. A good example of this collaboration is

the Right to Counsel project, where several legal services providers with expertise in eviction-defense partner with a growing list of (now) 17 law firms to increase access to counsel for low-income tenants with housing subsidies who are facing eviction. These tenants and their families risk not only losing their homes but also their valuable subsidies – a lifeline for those who cannot afford to pay the District’s ever-rising market rents. Since 2015, legal services attorneys and pro bono attorneys mentored by those attorneys have collectively represented over 700 tenants, making it possible for the vast majority of these tenants to stay in their homes, hold onto their housing subsidies, and avoid long-term homelessness.

The District’s commitment to civil justice also serves as a model to all segments of the community. The increase in funding from both the public and private spheres, commensurate with their joint commitment to equal access for all, is crucial. The Commission is grateful that the private bar has increasingly become an equal partner in funding access to justice work and that its contributions to direct legal services organizations have also increased. Each year, the Commission recognizes the contributions of the legal community through the Raising the Bar in D.C. Campaign, which establishes revenue-based benchmarks for law firm donations to legal services organizations. The campaign works hard to persuade more firms to support local legal services and to convince those already giving to do more. In 2017, the forty-eight firms that met benchmark levels collectively donated more than \$5.5 million to organizations that serve indigent District residents with urgent legal issues. This represents an approximately \$2.6 million dollar increase in giving by these firms since their entry into the Campaign. Significantly, these figures do not include the millions of additional dollars in individual philanthropy provided by private law firm attorneys annually to the legal services network. The Commission believes that this private-public partnership has been greatly incentivized by the District government’s long-standing support. As a matter of principle, the legal community recognizes that the burden of ensuring equal access to justice is a shared responsibility, and not one that can or should be borne by public dollars alone.

At their core, the numbers and project descriptions described in our testimony demonstrate how the District’s commitment to these programs changes the lives of individual District residents, many of whom have effective access to justice only because of these appropriations. However, it is also important to recognize the significant effect the funds have on the broader administration of justice, the well-being of the community, and the public fisc. By keeping families economically stable, legal services attorneys reduce reliance on costlier public benefits systems. Keeping clients housed lessens the need for homeless services. By moving clients from local to federally funded public benefits programs, they reduce the burden of these programs on the local budget. And through their work, they help enforce and

strengthen District laws that have been established to protect its residents. Our civil legal services network also provides invaluable benefits to the administration of justice by helping our local courts and administrative agencies identify and eliminate systemic barriers that deny unrepresented litigants access to justice and build faith among constituencies in the functioning of the justice system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about these vital programs. The District's support has helped countless District residents secure the legal assistance they must have to meet vital human needs, like housing, family stability, and public benefits, and in doing so, helps make the District a more just, stable community. We urge the Council to support the funding level proposed by the Mayor with the increase described earlier in this testimony. The Commission is confident that the District's continued public investment in these sound, effective programs is as important as ever. We are extraordinarily grateful for the Council's – and this Committee's – leadership in advancing access to justice in the District.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

**Public Hearing on Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request**

**Before the Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety**

**Testimony of Nancy E. Drane, Executive Director  
District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission**

**April 4, 2019**

**ATTACHMENTS**

- 1. Joint Statement of Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, District of Columbia Court of Appeals and Chief Judge Robert Morin, Superior Court for the District of Columbia**
- 2. Statement of Esther Lim, D.C. Bar President**

Before the Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety

Joint Statement of Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, District of Columbia Court of Appeals, and Chief Judge Robert Morin, Superior Court for the District of Columbia

FY 2020 Access to Justice Initiative Funding

We are pleased once again to write in support of the Access to Justice Initiative. As Chief Judges of the District of Columbia Courts, we are confronted every day by the serious justice gap that persists in our community. You can see great affluence living next to individuals in poverty or of modest means everywhere in the District of Columbia. The Court just completed an extensive strategic planning process where it closely examined the obstacles that most challenge our ability to provide equal access to justice for every resident of the District of Columbia. Chief among these challenges is the vast number of litigants who are forced to navigate our courts alone because they cannot afford counsel. So even though the courts are committed to providing equal access to all who come before us, it is extremely difficult to achieve this mission when so many litigants appear without the assistance of counsel.

The D.C. Courts are deeply committed to expanding access to justice, even at a time when our financial and judicial resources are constrained. Our strategic plan embraces a variety of approaches to further that goal, including enhanced self-help services and the use of technology to facilitate access to court services. The court has a number of initiatives under foot already in these areas, such as a court navigator program and an interactive forms project. As we are all keenly aware, even the most comprehensive pro se resources are not a substitute for counsel. The legal issues confronted by many litigants are complex and even the most sophisticated litigants struggle to understand the relevant statutes and rules, effectively raise complicated defenses, and present their evidence and arguments persuasively. For the high percentage of litigants who also struggle with additional obstacles, such as mental illness, physical disabilities, low literacy, and histories of domestic violence or trauma, self-representation can seem – and in practice be – impossible. For these litigants, counsel is indispensable.

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The Access to Justice Initiative is a fundamental and necessary part of any effort to provide equal justice for District residents facing significant civil legal challenges because it is a critical tool in securing legal representation for thousands of vulnerable District residents who seek redress in our tribunals each year. The funds ensure that countless residents who are in legal crisis have an advocate at their side when the things they most value – their children, their livelihood, their safety, their homes – are at risk. As judges, we understand what is at stake for these litigants, and how difficult it is for them to advocate for themselves, particularly when they find the forum intimidating and the law complex. As a judge, it is deeply distressing to have to adjudicate cases where the lack of counsel inhibits the full presentation of evidence and the persuasive presentation of legal arguments. The funds provided through the Access to Justice Initiative provide thousands of litigants with pressing legal issues the representation that they urgently need and greatly deserve. We and our colleagues on the bench witness each day the pivotal interventions that occur when legal representation is available to help those most in need.

As Chief Judges, we are also charged with ensuring the fair administration of justice more generally. Public trust and confidence in the courts is absolutely essential to our ability to do our jobs. When those who come to us to enforce their rights and liberties feel that economic disadvantage affects their fair treatment by our courts, it strains the fabric of our justice system and our rule of law-based society. It is crucial that all litigants have – and perceive themselves to have – an equal opportunity to have their cases fairly addressed. No matter how much we do institutionally and individually to enhance the experience of pro se litigants, the reality is that represented litigants are far more likely to feel that they have been fully and fairly heard by the Court. We simply cannot sustain public confidence in our civil justice system unless all litigants – regardless of income – feel they have had a true opportunity to present their case and have been treated fairly. While as judges we are focused on the individual cases that come before us, as Chief Judges we are also charged with improving the efficiency and operations of our courts. The participation of counsel has a far greater impact than improving outcomes in individual cases. Counsel present cases more efficiently thereby reducing litigant wait times and freeing up judicial resources. They ensure that dispositive issues are raised early in the case, reducing

time expended by parties and witnesses while also permitting judges to reach a just result in a timely manner.

The Access to Justice Initiative supports a number of essential court-based programs and/or resource centers in areas such as landlord-tenant, debt collection, small claims, child support, and domestic violence. These programs ensure that litigants appearing in court, perhaps for the first time, can access legal information and services either at the time of their hearing or in advance of that hearing. These programs may also assist in obtaining counsel. The court has supported the expansion of limited scope representation which has allowed these programs to serve more litigants. Further, we know that the Access to Justice Initiative supports scores of legal services attorneys who every day represent individual litigants in numerous areas of our courts, including some of our most high-volume branches.

The D.C. Courts are also committed to expanding the level of pro bono representation in our courts. The Court, in partnership with the Commission and the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, is pleased to recognize the community of pro bono lawyers who are already serving through the Capital Pro Bono Honor Roll, which honors the crucial pro bono contributions of private and federal government attorneys. We also want our vast community of private lawyers in the District to do more. We recognize that any pro bono effort is reliant on a well-funded and stable legal services network to ensure that the cases placed with volunteer lawyers are properly screened, and that these lawyers receive the training, mentoring, and support that they need to take on cases that may be outside their area of expertise. The District enjoys a robust and collegial pro bono community, and the legal services community is an essential part of its success.

The vision statement of the District of Columbia Courts is “Open to all, trusted by all, justice for all.” We, as well as all of our colleagues on the bench, are singularly committed to achieving this vision. We simply cannot do it alone. A skilled and resourced legal services network, which works full-time to protect the rights of the District’s most vulnerable residents, is vital. We are mindful of the many needs the D.C. Council must consider in formulating the FY 2020 budget and deeply appreciate this Committee’s strong and steadfast support of the

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Access to Justice Initiative. We hope that the Committee will support the highest possible funding level for this invaluable program.

Thank you for allowing us to address this important issue.

	
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The Honorable Anna Blackburne-Rigsby Chief Judge District of Columbia Court of Appeals	The Honorable Robert E. Morin Chief Judge Superior Court for the District of Columbia

April 1, 2019

**Before the Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety**

**Statement of Esther Lim, D.C. Bar President**

**FY 2020 Access to Justice Initiative Funding**

The D.C. Bar is pleased once again to write in support of the Access to Justice Initiative. On behalf of the Bar, its leadership, and its members, I would like to express our gratitude to the Mayor for supporting the Access to Justice Initiative and we also thank the D.C. Council for its continued support of the program, which provides critical legal assistance for low-income District residents. The Access to Justice Initiative makes a tremendous difference for District residents. The funds support the important work of civil legal services providers, offer loan repayment assistance to those D.C. Bar members who live and work in the District providing these services, and – importantly – increase the capacity of legal service providers to leverage private sector lawyers to do pro bono work.

The D.C. Bar is the largest mandatory bar in the country, and approximately 70,000 of our over 100,000 members live and work in the D.C. metropolitan area. Meaningful access to justice for every D.C. resident is one of our core values as a Bar, and we are very proud of the strong commitment of our members in devoting thousands of hours of pro bono time to providing legal services for those in need. We know that our members also provide considerable direct financial support for these organizations. These private sector pro bono services and contributions multiply the effect of the District's funding.

We are particularly proud of the work of the privately-funded D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, which also receives some of its funding through the Access to Justice Initiative's Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program. The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center works closely with a strong network of civil legal services organizations in the District. These organizations identify our neighbors who need pro bono assistance, facilitate the links between the clients and the pro bono lawyers, and provide staff for training and mentoring volunteer lawyers, thereby giving practical, day-to-day meaning to our commitment to access to justice. The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center also mobilizes lawyers to assist vital, community-based nonprofit organizations, and small businesses operating

in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. We make good use of lawyers who can only be available for a few hours as well as those who are prepared to spend months and years on a pro bono matter. Our experienced, dedicated staff provides training, expert mentoring, and ongoing support to make volunteering as easy as possible and ensure that our clients receive high-quality legal representation. This remarkably successful pro bono model allows the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center's small staff to serve 20,000 individuals per year.

The Access to Justice Initiative supports strong and effective providers of legal services, which in turn make pro bono possible. This funding leverages both private resources and District funding to provide more desperately needed legal services to District residents and allows more private sector lawyers working with legal services providers to offer their services on a pro bono basis. I have seen the powerful impact of this partnership between legal services providers and the private bar through my own pro bono work with the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center and other legal services providers.

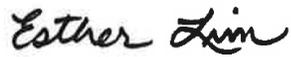
However, these substantial pro bono and charitable contributions are not enough to close the access to justice gap in the District. Our legal community is working hard to address the increased need. The partnership of a strong legal services provider network, the private bar, and the legal services funding appropriated by the District are all critical components that keep our legal services provider network running. The Access to Justice Initiative funding that the District provides allows full-time legal services attorneys to work to keep families in their homes, reinstate important public benefits, serve those children and families who experience domestic violence, protect the elderly and other vulnerable populations against predatory lenders, and much more.

A clear example of the important work funded by the Access to Justice Initiative can be found in the Landlord and Tenant Branch of D.C. Superior Court. Alongside its volunteer lawyers, the D.C. Bar staffs the Landlord and Tenant Resource Center, which serves over 4,000 tenants and small landlords annually. The resource center works closely with the other legal services providers that offer court-based services, many of whom are also supported by the Access to Justice Initiative. Assisting families so that they can remain in their homes means fewer families

have to resort to living in the District's already over-crowded shelter or public housing system, preserves affordable housing, and allow these families to remain more stable.

Again, the D.C. Bar thanks the District government for its commitment to helping the communities in our city living in poverty, in recognition of the importance of providing access to equal justice for the citizens of the District of Columbia.

Thank you for allowing me to address this important issue.



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Esther H. Lim  
D.C. Bar President 2018-2019

April 3, 2019