

May 4, 2020

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

RE: FY 2021 Access to Justice Initiative Funding

Mayor Bowser:

We hope that this letter finds you safe and well. Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented crisis.

Thanks to your commitment, the District is a National leader in supporting civil access to justice. We know that you are currently grappling with difficult budget decisions. Nevertheless, we urge you to continue to prioritize civil access to justice in the FY21 budget by providing sufficient funding to the Access to Justice Initiative, as requested by the D.C. Access to Justice Commission [earlier this year](#) and [again two weeks ago](#).

Civil legal aid is a critical part of the District's safety net, and will be an essential component of the District's recovery from the COVID-19 public health emergency. Funding the Access to Justice Initiative will ensure that District residents have access to the legal help they need to solve civil justice problems in areas like domestic violence, unemployment, debt, and housing. Vulnerable populations like District elders, those living with disabilities, and the immigrant population are particularly susceptible to these problems and especially in need of help.

The District will experience unprecedented demand for civil legal assistance as we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis. District residents who prior to this crisis managed to keep their families stable will now face unfamiliar civil legal needs they will be unprepared to address. At a time when access to civil legal services was already in need of greater support, any cuts to the Access to Justice Initiative would be devastating to our community.

We respectfully request that you and your team strongly consider the D.C. Access to Justice Commission's FY21 budget request to ensure that District residents have access to the legal help they will need to participate fully in the District's recovery from this unprecedented crisis.

Signed,

Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.
Amara Legal Center
Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center
Ayuda, Inc.
Bread for the City
Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)
Children's Law Center

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Christian Legal Aid of D.C.
D.C. Affordable Law Firm
D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center
D.C. Volunteer Lawyers Project
Disability Rights D.C. at University Legal Services
Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project (DVLEAP)
First Shift Justice Project
Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia
Legal Counsel for the Elderly
Network for Victim Recovery of D.C. (NVRDC)
Rising for Justice
School Justice Project
Tzedek D.C.
Washington Council of Lawyers
Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
Whitman-Walker Health

cc:

Mr. Rashad Young, City Administrator
Ms. Beverly Perry, Senior Advisor to the Mayor
Mr. Kevin Donahue, Deputy City Administrator & Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice
Ms. Betsy Cavendish, General Counsel to the Mayor and Acting Director, Mayor's Office of Legal Counsel
Ms. Jennifer Reed, Director of the Office of Budget and Finance
Ms. Michelle Garcia, Director of the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants