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# ABA Urges D.C. City Council Not to Slash Funding for Legal Aid to Poor, Working Class

WASHINGTON, D.C., Dec. 3, 2010 — The American Bar Association is speaking out against proposal by the Mayor of the District of Columbia to cut funding for the city’s Access to Justice Program by 50 percent.

“Given the high rate of unemployment and the number of the District’s residents facing critical legal problems such as mortgage foreclosures, evictions, credit defaults, family tensions caused by unemployment, and the loss of public benefits, this is no time to reduce the availability of needed legal services by those who cannot otherwise afford them,” wrote American Bar Association President Stephen N. Zack. The letter, addressed to Council Chairman and Mayor-Elect Vincent Gray, urges the Council not to make the cuts proposed by Mayor Adrian Fenty.

While the District faces severe budget pressures, Zack urged the Council to “fully fund” the Access to Justice Program because “without that funding, many of the District’s low-income residents will have no where to turn to receive the legal assistance that they so desperately need.”

In addition to the D.C. legal services network suffering a 25% loss of funding last year due to the reduction of other funding sources, Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts (IOLTA) revenue has declined again due to low interest rates. Zack added, “Under these circumstances, it is crucial that the City Council maintain its funding level to provide legal services to its most vulnerable residents.”

Zack urged the city council to support the $3.279 million in funding for the District’s Access to Justice Program for fiscal year 2012. This would maintain the FY 2011 funding level approved by the Council seven months ago.

This letter will be posted [here](http://www.abanet.org/poladv/letters/legalservices/2010dec3_legalservicesdccouncil_l.pdf).

With nearly 400,000 members, the American Bar Association is the largest voluntary professional membership organization in the world.  As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law.

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