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| DC Bar: Inside the Bar | graphic |
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| D.C. Council Restores Civil Legal Services Funding  Access to justice advocates were handed a big victory in May when the Council of the District of Columbia passed a $3.5 million budget for funding for civil legal services providers.  The approved 2011 budget restores a substantial portion of funding in comparison to 2009, which was $3.6 million. Originally, Mayor Adrian M. Fenty had proposed a budget cut of $1.8 million for 2011—a trim that would have represented a 50 percent decrease from 2009 levels.  “Even without these cuts from the District, the legal services network has taken a substantial financial hit due to the recession,” said Jessica Rosenbaum, executive director of the D.C. Access to Justice Commission. “Further cuts will undermine the network’s ability to provide urgent services to indigent clients; $1.8 [million] was really a scary number.”  The community fought to keep the funds intact. Social services providers, the legal services community, and voluntary bar associations sent letters to the D.C. Council. Additionally, 25 past D.C. Bar presidents signed a letter cautioning against the slashed budget, while the chief judges of both the D.C. Court of Appeals and D.C. Superior Court wrote about how crucial the funding was to the administration of justice. Also, 11 D.C. Bar Sections released public statements in hopes to block the cuts.  In April D.C. Bar President Kim M. Keenan testified on behalf of Bar members during the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary’s public budget oversight hearing. She spoke about the how the proposed funding cuts would hinder attorneys in the private sector to successfully complete pro bono work. Members of the Bar’s Board of Governors also called and e-mailed members of the D.C. Council, including at-large member Phil Mendelson who championed the program.  “It really demonstrated that there is a larger commitment to equal justice throughout the legal community. This is not just an issue for the legal services [providers],” Rosenbaum said. “We don’t want to have a system where folks who are poor will have to try navigating those [court] systems alone when the stakes are so high.”  With the approved budget, civil legal services providers can apply for grants for the upcoming year, beginning October 1. Grants are administered by the D.C. Bar Foundation. Funds will go toward providing legal services for indigent District residents, a Community Legal Interpreter Bank to help clients communicate with attorneys, and a Loan Repayment Assistance Program for attorneys who serve low-income members of the community.  Top of Form  -Select an Article- Run a Law Office Reform on Medicaid Antitrust Investigations New Member Benefit Pro Bono Initiative Report Bar Inaugurates Flagg Defense of Noncitizens Sections Pilot Webinar Look at Supreme Court U.S. District Court Seats Sections Election Results Legal Services Funding Mottley Wins Election Housing Conditions Calendar Hogan Auction Benefit Judicial Vacancy Washington Lawyer Public Comment Rule 1.10 Dues Payment Deadline Access to Family Court Amendments to IOLTA Rules BPR Requests Volunteers Bar Strategic Plan Notice to the Membership  Bottom of Form |

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