



April 6, 2023

My name is Whitney King and I serve as the executive director of Christian Legal Aid of the District of Columbia (CLADC). We believe that everyone deserves access to justice, and thank the Mayor and the City Council for investing in needed civil legal services for the District's most vulnerable residents.

Alongside legal services providers across the city, CLADC has provided legal advice and representation to hundreds of homeless and low-income residents with life-changing results, due in large part to the Access to Justice Initiative funding.

Two of CLADC's core practice areas in particular, criminal record sealing and probate administration, have far-reaching effects on the livelihoods and security of individuals and families in the District.

Through our criminal record sealing work, CLADC helps remove a significant barrier to viable employment for the 1 in 7 D.C. residents who have a publicly available criminal record.¹ Though the law allows for criminal records to be sealed under certain circumstances, it is exceedingly difficult for those in poverty to secure this right on their own. Without legal aid, thousands of residents continue to experience the collateral consequences of arrest, even if they were never convicted of a crime, in employment, housing, and other aspects of life.

Once records are sealed, however; the story changes. A recent study published in Harvard Law Review found that expungement resulted in a wage increase of 22 percent on average within one year.² An investment in legal services yields an ongoing return in the lives of D.C. residents and their families. At CLADC, we receive hundreds of referrals for record sealing services each year, and that number is growing. Without Access to Justice funding, our capacity to serve this need would be nearly halved.

With Access to Justice funding, CLADC also provides services in probate administration. We are one of only a few legal services organizations providing free probate help to low-income District residents. And yet, the demand for these services is only expected to grow. According to a 2022 report from the D.C. Estate Administration Working Group "The complexity of probate administration, coupled with an expected surge in cases and the lack of resources for self-represented individuals, creates a growing crisis..."³ CLADC's experience confirms the Working Group's findings that probate administration intersects with many basic needs for low-income D.C. families and can be part of exacerbating *or* intervening in cycles of poverty. Access to Justice funding over

¹ Duane, M., Reimal, E., and Lynch, M. Urban Institute. (July 2017). *Criminal Background Checks and Access to Jobs: A Case Study of Washington, DC*.

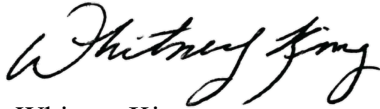
² Prescott, J.J. and Starr, Sonja B. *Expungement of Criminal Convictions: An Empirical Study*, 133 HARV. L. REV. 2460 (2020)

³ D.C. Estate Administration Working Group, (February 2022) *Strengthening Probate Administration in the District of Columbia*.

the last two years has been critical to CLADC's ability to step in before the complexities of probate cases exacerbate the cycles poverty for many District residents.

I thank the Mayor and City Council for their investments in the Access to Justice Initiative to date. This has already led to life-changing results for many of D.C.'s low-income residents, but the need is still great, and it is growing. We join the Access to Justice Commission in urging the Council to ensure that civil legal aid providers are able to meet this need head-on.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Whitney King". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Whitney King
Executive Director