



April 10, 2023

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the Council of the District of Columbia,

As the Executive Director of First Shift Justice Project, I write to express my gratitude for the funding made available to D.C.-based legal services nonprofits through the Access to Justice Initiative and to express my support for continued funding. The Access to Justice Initiative provides funding for almost every legal services program in the District of Columbia that serves D.C.'s low-income residents, regarding legal matters from housing to education to family to consumer to employment. Access to Justice funding increases the possibility that our legal and administrative processes in the District will yield more just outcomes by contributing to leveling the playing field among the parties involved.

First Shift Justice Project was founded in 2014 with a mission to support D.C. working mothers and other family caregivers in the exercise of their workplace rights, with a goal of helping our clients maintain employment. With funding through the Access to Justice Initiative, First Shift hired its first part-time staff attorney in 2016 to staff its Latina Outreach Project. First Shift now receives funding from the Access to Justice Initiative for an additional project, to inform and assist D.C. workers who need to access paid leave benefits from D.C.'s paid family medical leave program. Access to Justice funding has been sustained funding which is critical to First Shift's growth as an organization and supported us in delivering essential services to D.C.'s working mothers and caregivers.

Access to legal services is fundamental to increasing racial equity, as a way of ensuring that all D.C. residents - not just the ones who can afford private legal counsel - can protect and maintain their employment, housing, and their own physical security. In 2022, First Shift provided individualized, employment-related legal services to 125 clients, 82% of which are people of color residing in Wards 4,5, 7, and 8. First Shift partnered with D.C. organizations like Community of Hope, Mary's Center, Briya Public Charter School, Unity

Health Care, and Bread for the City to provide legal education and training to over 700 health professionals, pregnant people, and family caregivers.

For First Shift and for legal services providers all over the District, the Access to Justice Initiative is an essential source of funding. Among the many needs that the Council is considering during this budget season, I request that you prioritize the right of D.C residents to exercise and enforce legal protections that safeguard their capacity to be productive, contributing members of our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura A. Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laura" and the last name "Brown" clearly legible.

Laura Brown, Executive Director

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