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Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) champions the dignity and rights of Washington, D.C. elders by providing free legal and social work services to those in need. The Access to Justice (ATJ) Initiative provides critical funds for our efforts to help residents age 60+ stay in their homes, improve their financial security, and plan for their futures. **A reduction in this funding – especially as COVID-19 related protections have ended with the conclusion of the Public Health Emergency – would put our older neighbors at risk of homelessness and extreme financial distress.**

Thanks to the ATJ funds, LCE has expanded the breadth and depth of our legal work. Specifically:

- LCE doubled the size of its practice that supports tenants facing eviction. In a city where 95% of landlords are represented by lawyers – and nearly 95% of tenants are not – supports from LCE and our legal services partners are essential. A recent study showed that tenants with legal representation were 5 times less likely to be ordered an eviction, and 3.5 times more likely to enter into settlement agreements. **Loss of ATJ funding would mean that more older adults will become homeless, and fewer will be connected to food, medical care, utilities supports, and other resources they need to age with dignity.**
- LCE increased supports to older adults who need help accessing public benefits, ensuring – they receive Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Income, SNAP, Medicaid, Medicare, and utility subsidies. **Loss of ATJ funds would mean that fewer clients would apply for and maintain these critical payments, resulting in economic harm and jeopardizing lives.**
- LCE provided “legal house calls” to DC’s vulnerable senior homebound population in apartment buildings, homes, and long-term care facilities. We help homebound clients with a variety of issues including public benefits, home-related issues, and preparation of life planning documents – wills, powers of attorney, and transfer on death deeds. **Loss of ATJ funds would mean that our homebound neighbors would have limited access to financial resources, lose self-determination and experience even greater isolation.**
- LCE expanded probate work, through which we represent people living in homes legally titled to a parent, grandparent, or other family member. Without the probate process, low-income residents cannot access loans, grants, and property tax supports as homeowners, putting them at risk of foreclosure. Currently LCE is the only legal services program in the DC that offers full probate services. **Loss of ATJ funds would risk loss of generational wealth, homeownership, and community stability.**

Cutting funding for this work would have a devastating impact. During the pandemic, the federal government and DC put much-needed measures in

place to safeguard our communities from its worst impacts. This included emergency SNAP benefits, continuous Medicaid coverage, eviction moratoria, and additional funding for rental assistance. Today, those benefits are being rolled back despite the continued need. SNAP emergency benefits have ended, and continuous Medicaid coverage is scheduled to end. Eviction cases continue to clog up the superior court, the Emergency Rental Assistance Program has run out of funding for this fiscal year, and DC prepares for increased housing instability with the upcoming rent increase of up to 8.9% starting this May. **As many of our older neighbors are still reeling from the financial, material, and physical impacts of the pandemic and decreasing protections, decreasing legal advocacy will exacerbate the unjust burden they carry.**

With continued ATJ and CLCPP funding, we will be able to continue the important work of serving our community, conducting outreach to difficult-to-reach populations, and adding to the safety network for those who are facing evictions, need to secure an income, and prepare for their future. To meet the vast need, we need is an increase – not a decrease – in funding. We hope that DC Council will reconsider the proposed budget. **Justice is not possible without leveling the playing field, and this funding is critical to making that happen.**

Respectfully submitted,



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Executive Director
Legal Counsel for the Elderly