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**Submission to the Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety**

Legal Aid of the District of Columbia urges the Council to recommit fully to funding critical legal services for District residents. The Mayor's proposed 60% cut in Access to Justice funding – from \$31 million to approximately \$13 million – would be devastating for District residents who need help preventing unlawful evictions, challenging erroneous denials of food support, staving off illegal debt collection practices, or fleeing domestic violence with their children.

Legal Aid is the largest grantee for Access to Justice funds. This support provides more than 40% of our funding, and 46 of our 93 employees are paid using these funds. Crucially, non-personnel services make up a very small part of these grants, so there is no way to absorb large cuts without cutting personnel and the services they provide.

If Legal Aid were forced to reduce services, it would coincide with a dramatic *increase* in requests for help over the past year:

- A nearly 20% increase in general calls for legal services at Legal Aid in the past year;
- Doubling in requests for help with Food Stamps, debt collection, and eviction defense;
- Skyrocketing applications for representation, as compared to 2021 and 2022, at both the Domestic Violence Intake Center (DVIC) and the Landlord Tenant Resource Center.

Access to Justice Funding in 2023 supports Legal Aid attorneys who are engaged in meaningful (and life changing) litigation to protect vulnerable members of the community. These include:

- At the DVIC-NW, Access to Justice funds will enable Legal Aid staff members to represent domestic violence survivors in approximately 210 cases, securing a Civil Protection Order (CPO) either by consent, default, or following a contested trial in the vast majority of cases. A CPO is a temporary safety solution, and often one of

the first steps a survivor takes before leaving an abusive relationship. Social science demonstrates the importance of [legal services](#) at this stage in breaking the cycle of violence and reducing domestic violence overall.

- ATJ funds will also enable Legal Aid's housing team to represent at least 400 individuals or families in eviction defense cases, either challenging the merits of the claim for eviction, or negotiating agreements favorable to tenants to protect their rights and resources, and minimize the disruptiveness of moving.

The Council must restore Access to Justice Funding to the 2023 level in order to prevent catastrophic outcomes for the District's most vulnerable residents. Legal services attorneys are on the front lines every day ensuring that complicated bureaucratic and legal systems work for the members of our community who need them most. Without this investment, the Council will be leaving thousands of DC residents without representation, which likely means the difference between success and failure in maintaining housing, securing custody, and getting health care.