



MAY 29, 2024 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

D.C. Access to Justice Commission Statement on District’s FY25 Budget

Today the D.C. Council voted for a FY25 budget that restores Access to Justice Initiative funding to \$31.668M, equal to FY24 funding levels. This reverses a \$21.211M or 67% proposed cut to the program.

We applaud Chairman Phil Mendelson and his colleagues for this investment in life-changing civil legal services that are delivered to District residents by local non-profits. This work promotes public safety, protects housing stability, and advances economic opportunity for tens of thousands of D.C. residents each year. “The Chairman has been involved with the Initiative from its beginning over 17 years ago, and we would not be where we are today without his and the Council’s efforts to champion the program and recognize its value each year,” said Commission Chair Peter B. Edelman.

We also thank Judiciary Committee Chair Brooke Pinto and her colleagues, Councilmember Charles Allen, Councilmember Anita Bonds, Councilmember Vincent Gray, and Councilmember Christina Henderson – as well as Business & Economic Development Committee Chair Kenyan McDuffie and Health Committee Chair Christina Henderson and their fellow committee members – for the contributions those committees made towards restored funding. Throughout the budget process, all Councilmembers recognized the Initiative as a priority, to which we are profoundly grateful. “Each Councilmember recognized the importance of the Initiative to the District community as-a-whole and also to their constituents in each Ward across the District,” said Commission Vice Chair James. J. Sandman.

Restored funding will:

- **address housing instability among District residents**, with over 50% of Initiative funding supporting eviction-prevention efforts that are proven to be effective at a time when the current number of evictions, calls for help among tenants, and open cases in court is rising;
- **promote public safety**, with funds supporting programs that offer help to survivors of domestic- and gender-based violence, combat recidivism, and support youth at risk;
- **promote economic stability in the community**, with supported services combatting economic risk and inopportunity, addressing employment-related problems, and helping District residents access vital benefit programs; and
- **uniquely support thousands of vulnerable District residents**, such as children, elders, individuals with disabilities, the immigrant community, and other special populations who are served by Initiative programs targeted at serving their unique needs.

The District government has long recognized the value and impact of civil legal services on the safety, economic stability, and community health of the District community. The Access to Justice Initiative – as strategically administered by the D.C. Bar Foundation – is a lifeline for the thousands of District

residents who rely on it for legal help. To learn more about the Initiative's impact, visit the Commission's website at <https://dcaccesstojustice.org/access-public-funding/> and the D.C. Bar Foundation's website at <https://www.dcbfoundation.org/grant-programs>.

Even with these investments, the Commission recognizes that we face a civil justice crisis in our city where needs consistently eclipse capacity. We look forward to continuing to work with the Mayor and the D.C. Council to ensure that this program receives consistent, reliable funding to ensure these services remain available in the community. We must prioritize sustained and sufficient funding for the Initiative so that as many residents as possible have the access to civil justice that they deserve in our nation's capital.

Peter B. Edelman, Chair and James J. Sandman, Vice Chair

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