



## D.C. Law Firms Urge Restored Funding for Civil Legal Services

May 5, 2026

Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

RE: FY27 Access to Justice Initiative Funding

Dear Chairman Mendelson, Judiciary Committee Chair Pinto, and Members of the D.C. Council:

We write as leaders of major D.C. law firms to express strong support for the Access to Justice Initiative. Thanks to the D.C. Council's leadership, the Initiative is a model for the nation. The Initiative is a sound public investment that prevents more costly government interventions, serves vulnerable residents, and uniquely leverages the pro bono service of our firms' lawyers.

We are deeply concerned that the Mayor's proposed FY27 budget would cut 86% of Initiative funding -- from \$31.785 million in FY26 to \$4.487 million -- reducing funding to its lowest level since FY15. This drastic reduction would reverse recent progress and harm the more than 44,000 District residents served each year through Initiative funds. **We urge the Council to make restoration of Initiative funding a Council-wide priority.**

Initiative-funded legal services help District residents avoid homelessness, escape domestic violence, protect wages and employment, address fraud and debt, stabilize families, and safeguard seniors -- outcomes that strengthen community stability and public safety. Eliminating recent investments made in the program is especially damaging when legal shifts and economic pressures continue to increase community need.

The Initiative delivers measurable returns. Through their legal work for vulnerable District residents the Initiative's grantees have generated significant Medicaid savings, preserved millions of dollars for District families through consumer advocacy, and national studies consistently show that civil legal services return approximately \$7 for every \$1 invested.

Initiative funding also has a multiplier effect insofar as it makes possible increased pro bono contributions from the private bar in the District. When volunteering their time to assist District residents, our attorneys rely on the work that Initiative grantees and their staff do in building trusting relationships with communities, screening cases, and providing training and mentorship to volunteers. In FY25, volunteer lawyers handled or co-counseled more than 2,200 cases as a direct result of the Initiative, and Initiative grantees secured approximately \$60 million in pro bono support from private firms like ours. To be clear, pro bono services cannot fill the drastic gap that would be created by the proposed funding cuts, and to the contrary, cutting the Initiative's funds would diminish our ability to provide pro bono services at current levels, sharply reducing the Initiative's multiplier effect.

We appreciate the Council's leadership on access to justice. Initiative funding fuels a strong, public-private partnership between law firms and legal services organizations. Your example reminds us of our own obligations to provide both financial and pro bono support to legal services organizations, and incentivizes us to do more. We respectfully urge you to restore full funding for the Access to Justice Initiative in FY27.

Sincerely,

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP – Anthony T. Pierce, DC Office Managing Partner  
Arent Fox Schiff LLP – Brian Waldman, Firmwide Managing Partner  
Ballard Spahr LLP – John Socknat, DC Office Managing Partner  
Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP – Jeffrey D. Karpf, Managing Partner  
Cooley LLP – Andrew Goldstein and Brendan Hughes, DC Office, Partners in Charge  
Covington & Burling LLP – Douglas G. Gibson, Chair  
Crowell & Moring LLP – Philip T. Inghima, Chair, Management Board  
Dechert LLP – Megan C. Johnson, Washington DC Office Managing Partner  
DLA Piper LLP (US) – William H. Minor, DC Office Managing Partner  
Eversheds Sutherland – Lino Mendiola, Global Co-CEO and US Chief Executive  
Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner LLP – James R. Barney, Managing Partner  
Fish & Richardson P.C. – Rich Sterba, DC Office Managing Principal  
Haynes and Boone LLP – Adrian Azer, DC Office Managing Partner  
Hogan Lovells – Ajay Kuntamukkala, DC Office Managing Partner  
Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP – Seth M. Messner, DC Office Managing Partner  
Latham & Watkins LLP – Amanda Reeves, DC Office Managing Partner  
Lowenstein Sandler LLP - Zarema Jaramillo, DC Office Managing Partner  
Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP – Donna L. Wilson, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Partner  
McDermott Will & Schulte LLP – Paul M. Thompson, DC Office Managing Partner

McGuireWoods LLP – Tracy Walker, Managing Partner

Miller & Chevalier – William P. Barry, Executive Committee Chair

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Wiley Rein LLP - Peter Shields, Managing Partner

Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP - Kimberly Parker, Partner & Co-Chair