



WISCONSIN BOARD FOR PEOPLE  
WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

April 4, 2017

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sean Duffy  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mike Gallagher  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Glenn Grothman  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ron Kind  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Gwen Moore  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mark Pocan  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James Sensenbrenner  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: Support for Funding of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC)**

Honorable Members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation:

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) is extremely concerned with the President's proposal to eliminate the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Elimination of civil legal aid funding will result in disproportionate and serious impacts to people with developmental disabilities. We urge you to ensure the federal budget funds the LSC.

BPDD is Wisconsin's state developmental disabilities council, charged under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act with advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to improve self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for people with developmental disabilities. We work and hear from people with disabilities and their families across the state.

Our role is to seek continuous improvement across all systems—education, transportation, health care, employment, etc.—that touch the lives of people with disabilities. The legal system is complicated and difficult to navigate without legal advice. People with developmental disabilities are particularly reliant on competent civil legal aid to protect their rights and ensure they are able to access housing, health

care, and other services and supports that keep people with disabilities independent, participating in the workforce, and out of expensive publically funded institutions.

The LSC brings more than \$5 million to Wisconsin every year for critically needed civil legal aid. The legal information, assistance, and representation provided by the LSC's two Wisconsin grantees, Legal Action of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Judicare, is vital to the safety and stability of Wisconsin's low-income residents with developmental disabilities. It also greatly helps to ensure the efficient and effective operation of our state's courts.

More than 30% of the clients served by Wisconsin's two LSC funded organizations—Wisconsin Legal Action and Wisconsin Judicare—are people with disabilities. Every year, LSC-funded organizations help to solve the civil legal problems of more than 4,000 low-income people with disabilities statewide. Civil legal aid funding means that people with developmental disabilities have access to legal advice and representation to avoid eviction and homelessness, foreclosures, and inappropriate garnishment of wages or civil lawsuits. Many people with developmental disabilities need accommodations guaranteed under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or supports available under Wisconsin programs to maintain independence and contribute to their communities; civil legal aid provides assistance to people with disabilities when they are wrongfully being denied their legal rights.

Without civil legal aid assistance, BPDD is concerned that courts could be used by unscrupulous landlords, employers, and others as a mechanism to intimidate or victimize people with disabilities. The threat of being taken to court without the ability to have help navigating the process or defend oneself would result in abuse of this population.

The free, high-quality legal assistance provided by the Wisconsin LSC grantees is essential to protect the rights of vulnerable populations, including people with developmental disabilities. These resources are especially critical to people with disabilities living in rural areas. Because of LSC funding these legal services is available in every Wisconsin County. Navigating our complex legal system should not be dependent on where you live or income.

We urge you to restore funding for the Legal Services Corporation in the federal budget.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like more information on the services we provide and how devastating it would be if the Legal Services Corporation were eliminated or cut.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beth Swedeen". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large initial 'B' and a long, sweeping underline.

Beth Swedeen, Executive Director, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities