



## NEW JERSEY STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

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Governor Chris Christie  
Office of the Governor  
Post Office Box 001  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear Governor Christie:

The drastic \$5 Million cut to funding for Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) in the state's proposed FY2018 budget will have a grave impact on that organization and will do significant harm to the thousands of New Jersey residents who utilize its services every day. On behalf of the 18,200 members of the New Jersey State Bar Association (NJSBA), I urge with you to reconsider this cut and to restore LSNJ funding so that its vital work in New Jersey can continue uninterrupted.

The work that Legal Services of New Jersey does for vulnerable residents is life-changing and reflects the goodwill and kind heart that government should have toward those who need it most. It is an investment that returns its full value and then some by interrupting dire consequences that can often result in residents turning to reliance on other government resource programs, and it promotes efficiency in the operations of the justice system by curtailing minor problems before they grow out of control and overwhelm. Moreover, the pro bono activity facilitated by legal aid funding is exactly the kind of public-private partnership the government should encourage, not eliminate; it brings forward vastly more resources with each dollar funded by way of New Jersey attorneys' pro bono involvement through LSNJ's operations.

Indeed, the NJSBA knows the value of LSNJ firsthand. Lawyers who are members of the association provide countless hours of pro bono legal services to LSNJ clients in desperate need of assistance. The association has put together opportunities for residents in underserved communities to speak to volunteer attorneys about their legal problems and the turnout has been overwhelming. Last month, in Union City, over 150 residents showed up to speak to just over two dozen attorneys and many more were given contact information because time simply had run out. There is a demonstrable need for these legal services and LSNJ is at the heart of providing them.

In its 50<sup>th</sup> year of proud service, Legal Services of New Jersey has logged representation of over 2.4 million cases and 7 million clients. Sadly, the need for these services have not reduced. Instead, nearly a decade after the Great Recession, more people need LSNJ's help with overwhelming legal problems – which are quite literally life and death matters – than any time since the beginning of the 1960s.

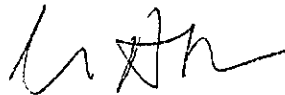
LSNJ has already seen extreme budget cuts to Legal Services resulting from reductions in its funding sources, including the unanticipated decrease in IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts) funding, a drastic increase resulting from the recession in 2007. This year, Legal Services funding is facing a critical reduction not just in this year's state budget – a reduction of \$5 million – but threats to cut off federal funding – which makes up 12 to 14 percent of the Legal Services budget.

The impact of the proposed funding cuts would be felt by thousands of New Jersey residents. In 2016, close to 47,000 cases were opened on behalf of 120,000 clients. The proposed funding cuts in New Jersey's FY2018 budget would strip 5,000 cases from next year's caseload, or 15,000 clients. The additional funding cuts proposed at the federal level would strip an additional 6,700 cases, affecting just over 20,000 more potential clients. **That's almost 30 percent of New Jersey's neediest residents who would be turned away as a result of LSNJ funding cuts from both the state and the federal government.**

As you know, there is no right to counsel in most civil legal cases. The people who turn to LSNJ have nowhere to turn to secure a lawyer on their own. Their legal matters are dire in most cases – these are people fighting homelessness against illegal evictions; senior couples who are facing foreclosures based on predatory lending practices; domestic violence victims; and people who rely on much-needed public assistance from government programs. LSNJ also provide a vital hand-up to state residents who have been ravaged by drug and alcohol dependency who depend on the agency to protect their legal rights and interests in their time of need as they rebuild their lives and return to being fully productive and functioning citizens. Funding legal services promotes better lives and reduces reliance on government subsidies.

Now is not the time to cut funding to the state's most vulnerable. New Jersey residents need LSNJ and the services it provides more than ever. We urge you not to cut LSNJ funding and to restore its funding to its current levels. Thank you for your consideration of this very important issue.

Respectfully,



Thomas H. Prol  
President

cc: Angela C. Scheck, Executive Director  
Senator Paul Sarlo, Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee  
Assemblyman Gary S. Schaer, Assembly Budget Committee