

House of Delegates Resolution 2014

Resolution in Support of Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid

WHEREAS, providing equal access to justice and high quality legal representation to all Louisiana citizens is central to the mission of the Louisiana State Bar;

WHEREAS, equal access to justice plays an important role in the perception of fairness of the justice system;

WHEREAS, programs providing civil legal aid to low-income Louisianans are a fundamental component of the Bar's effort to provide such access;

WHEREAS, civil legal aid programs in Louisiana have sustained a significant drop in state and federal funding and poverty in Louisiana has increased significantly over the last 6 years causing more Louisianans to be in need of civil legal aid, as demonstrated by the following facts:

- (1) Interest rates on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) funds have declined 74 percent between 2007 and 2011, resulting in unavoidable cuts in IOLTA funding for legal services for the poorest citizens;
- (2) Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the largest single donor nationally for civil legal aid, has seen funding per eligible client drop by almost 60 percent over the past decade;
- (3) Louisiana's civil legal aid programs have lost more than a third of their LSC funding over the last five years;
- (4) Louisiana's poverty rates are among the nation's highest, 19.9 percent compared to 15.9 percent nationally. Nearly one in five Louisianans lived in poverty last year, the third highest rate in the nation. That includes more than 300,000 children, 28 percent; the fourth highest rate in the nation.

WHEREAS, declines in funding combined with Louisiana's high poverty rate overwhelm the limited staff and resources of civil legal aid offices, which undermine the ability of low-income citizens to access the civil justice system, burden state agencies and resources and place Louisiana's already challenged legal aid system in crisis;

WHEREAS, assistance from the Louisiana State Bar and the legal community is critical to maintaining and developing resources that will provide low-income Louisiana citizens meaningful access to the justice system;

WHEREAS, the Louisiana State Bar Association and Louisiana Bar Foundation, together with other key Louisiana legal service organizations, have united to launch and promote a statewide effort, the *Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid*. The mission of the Campaign is to spread awareness and increase the resources available to address the critical need for civil legal aid in Louisiana.

RESOLVED, that the Louisiana State Bar:

- (1) Strengthen its commitment and ongoing efforts to improve the availability of a full range of legal services to all citizens of our state, through the development and maintenance of adequate support and funding for civil legal services programs for low-income Louisiana citizens.
- (2) Actively participate in the efforts of the Louisiana Bar Foundation's **Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid** to increase contributions by establishing goals of a 100 percent participation rate by members of the House of Delegates and Board of Governors, 75 percent of Louisiana State Bar Sections, and a 50 percent participation rate by all lawyers.
- (3) Encourage Louisiana lawyers to support civil legal services programs through enhanced pro bono work.

Respectfully Submitted,

Leo C. Hamilton, Bar No. 1399
Chair, LSBA Bill of Rights Section

APPROVED BY HOUSE OF DELEGATES AND BOARD OF GOVERNORS
JANUARY 25, 2014
BATON ROUGE, LA