

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OF CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES

MidPenn Legal Services provides free representation to Berks County low-income families needing help with child custody, domestic violence, housing, public benefits, employment and consumer issues.

In 2015-16 MidPenn's Reading office staff of five attorneys, two paralegals and two support personnel handled a total of 1,333 cases, resulting in 3,443 Berks County residents benefiting from MidPenn's advocacy. While that number is significant, the number of persons eligible to receive MidPenn's services is much greater. In 2014, Berks County's poverty population was determined to be in excess of 57,000.

Providing legal representation to the poor is critical. Many studies have shown that legal aid returns far more in benefits than in costs to communities across America. Nevertheless, the new administration's budget office is considering a proposal to eliminate all funding of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). If that were to occur, MidPenn would suffer a severe cutback in its ability to help the poor. LSC provides funding for 32% of MidPenn's operating budget.

Interestingly, the amount of federal funds provided to LSC represents 1/100th of one percent of the entire federal budget. Eliminating LSC funding will have minimal impact on the budget but will have an incredible impact in the lives of the nation's poor.

Over the years, the LSC has drawn bipartisan support in Congress, where it is recognized that the benefits of the LSC's work reach every congressional district. That support should not end. To assure access to justice to all, the Berks County Bar Association supports continued federal funding of civil legal services at its current level.