

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

June 1, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice-Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senators Shelby, Leahy, Blunt, and Murray:

As you consider additional resources to address the current pandemic, we urge you to provide the Administration for Community Living at the Department of Health and Human Services with \$20 million to support senior legal service providers. These funds will help ensure seniors have access to legal services, including hotlines, to meet their civil legal needs during the pandemic and in its aftermath.

With 10,000 people turning 65 every day, there is a growing need for accessible legal assistance for seniors who report abuse and neglect, experience threats to income security, or endure other violations. Yet, due to a lack of accessible and affordable assistance, many older adults, particularly those with limited resources, never receive justice. According to a survey, low-income seniors sought legal assistance for only 19% of their civil legal issues, and received inadequate or no professional legal help for approximately 87% of their problems.¹

Experts have indicated that legal providers are likely to experience an increase in request for help during and after the pandemic.² For example, as freezes on evictions and foreclosures lift, housing-related cases are expected to drastically rise. Additionally, those who experienced abuse while under stay-at-home orders may seek legal support. And, as seniors confront current

¹ *The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans*. Legal Services Corporation, June 2017. <https://www.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/images/TheJusticeGap-FullReport.pdf>

² Dalin, Hilary et al. "Legal Delivery Tools in the Age of Coronavirus." BIFOCAL, A Journal of the ABA Commission on Law and Aging, vol. 41, issue 5, May-June 2020, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/law_aging/resources/coronavirus-update-and-the-elder-law-community/legal-delivery-tools-in-the-age-of-coronavirus/

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economic realities, they will undoubtedly seek services to help them access public benefits such as cash assistance, health care and nutrition.

This increase in demand, along with the expected ongoing caution for health and safety in interactions between clients and providers, requires that senior legal services have necessary resources to be agile in their delivery.³ This requires these organizations to increase their abilities to work remotely, including enhancing or creating senior legal hotlines to allow seniors to receive assistance over the phone. Senior legal service organizations are, and will continue to be, a lifeline to many seniors. However, many operate on a shoe string budget and require additional funding to help them meet their clients' needs during this unprecedented time.

As the senior legal community continues to address the growing needs of its clients, Congress should ensure that these legal networks have necessary resources by providing dedicated funding through the Older Americans Act (OAA), which supports a wide range of social services and programs for seniors. Providing senior legal services with \$20 million in dedicated resources will ensure that seniors' increasing demand for these services will be better met.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to working with you to ensure that Congress meets the needs of America's seniors and provides them with access to legal services.

Sincerely,



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

³ Ibid.