

Letter from Benjamin L. Cardin, U.S. Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin

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United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-2004

October 11, 2007

Greetings:

Let me congratulate the University of Maryland School of Law for hosting this important symposium today on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Maryland Legal Services Corporation. Let me also thank the hard work of the University of Maryland Law Journal of Race, Religion, Gender and Class in organizing today's event.

As a former Chairman of the Maryland Legal Services Corporation, I am indeed proud of MLSC's accomplishments. MLSC grants have exceeded over \$100 million to help provide civil legal assistance in more than 1.4 million legal matters. MLSC also helped establish the Clinical Law requirement at the law school, which requires its students to provide legal services to people who lack access to lawyers.

I am also very pleased to see that this afternoon the symposium will discuss setting an agenda for the future of legal services in Maryland. I am concerned with the findings of the federal Legal Services Corporation 2005 study, "Documenting the Justice Gap in America." The study found that 50 percent of potential clients requesting assistance from an LSC grantee were turned away due to lack of program resources. Several state studies also indicated that less than 20 percent of the legal needs of low-income Americans are being met. The study also concluded that there is one legal service attorney for every 6,861 low-income persons, compared to one attorney delivering civil legal assistance for every 525 persons in the general population, which is a ratio of thirteen times greater.

We cannot allow this justice gap to continue, and we must move to increase access to justice for low-income Americans who need an attorney to provide civil legal assistance. Equal justice under the law is required to maintain the rule of law. As a freshman member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I intend to hold hearings in the coming months on this issue, and intend to introduce legislation next year on this matter.

I look forward to working with many of you at this symposium on improving access to justice during the next twenty-five years of the MLSC. Thank you again for all of your hard work, and best wishes for a successful symposium.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

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