February 16, 2011

Dear Representative:

This afternoon during debate on the H.R. 1 bill, the House will vote on an amendment offered by Representative Jeff Duncan (R-SC) that would eliminate funding for all legal aid programs funded by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). The UAW strongly urges you to vote against the Duncan amendment.

The UAW has been a long-standing supporter of equal access to justice, and LSC is one of the most important means of providing such access to our nation’s neediest citizens. The UAW supported the creation of LSC and has advocated for the program and its funding since its establishment in 1974. Moreover, UAW Local 2320, the National Organization of Legal Services Workers, represent two thousand legal aid attorneys, paralegals and support staff across the country.

LSC provides low-income Americans with access to high quality legal assistance in civil matters, currently funding over 140 independent legal aid programs located in every state and territory in the United States. Over 95 percent of LSC’s federal funding is distributed to these local programs which, in turn, provide services that address the most basic civil legal needs of our poorest and most vulnerable citizens. Approximately 70 percent of LSC clients are women, many of whom are victims of domestic violence.

Military families avail themselves of LSC-funded program services for help with issues related to housing, accessing government assistance, and other critical needs. Many persons with disabilities rely on LSC to gain the benefits and employment opportunities that allow them to live independent and productive lives.

The need for increased funding for LSC is urgent, driven by the rise in the nation’s poverty rate. Today, unfortunately, over 50 million persons are eligible for LSC-funded services, generally limited to those with incomes below 125 percent of the poverty line.
The UAW believes it is unconscionable to propose or support the elimination of funding for the Legal Services Corporation, leaving hundreds of thousands of needy Americans with no access to justice. Rather, funding for LSC should be substantially increased to close the justice gap and to provide civil legal services to all needy Americans.

Accordingly, we urge you to vote against the Duncan amendment.

Sincerely yours,

Barbara Somson
Legislative Director