The UAW urges Congress to support funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the federal program that promotes equal access to justice in civil cases for low income and poor Americans. LSC funded programs provide legal representation in domestic violence, child support, consumer fraud, government benefits, and many other areas where legal assistance is crucial to maintaining the necessities of life for low-income Americans. The economic crisis has significantly increased the demand for representation, while funding to support these vital services has been reduced.

LSC is currently funded at $404 million, which represents a 4% cut from its FY 2010 level. For FY 2012, the House Appropriations Committee proposed to reduce LSC’s funding to $300 million—an additional cut of 26%. The proposed cut would jeopardize the work of legal aid programs and deny assistance to thousands of low-income Americans, including the elderly, victims of domestic violence, children, veterans and the disabled.

Funding civil legal services is also a solid investment for the economy. LSC programs are preventative services, helping to maintain existing housing, provide income supports, health care and protection from abuse, thereby saving money on more costly crisis intervention in the form of homeless shelters and emergency room visits. For example, A 2010 Florida Tax Watch Report found that LSC funding was good for the local economy, generating $4.78 of economic impact for every $1 spent on civil legal services.

Already this year, as a result of funding cuts at the state and local level, LSC programs have reduced staff by a net of 445 employees through layoff and attrition, including more than 200 staff attorneys. Nearly 60 percent of the programs across the country project budget deficits for 2011, totaling more than $19 million. More than 40 percent of programs have imposed salary freezes and one-third anticipate reducing employee benefits this year.

Since 2008, when the current economic downturn began, the poverty population in the United States has grown by 17 percent. This is not the time to undercut the fundamental American commitment to equal justice for all.

The Senate will be working on FY 2012 Appropriations bills after the recess. We strongly urge Senators to support the President’s budget request of $450 million for LSC in FY 2012 and to insist on increased funding for LSC in Conference Committee with the House.

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