

*"The Unified Voice of Legal Services"*



April 10, 2015

The Honorable Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.  
State Capitol, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Loni Hancock  
State Capitol, Room 2082  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Mark Leno  
State Capitol, Room 5100  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Melissa Melendez  
State Capitol, Suite 6031  
Sacramento, CA 94249

The Honorable Jim Nielsen  
State Capitol, Room 2068  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Shirley Weber  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 942849  
Sacramento, CA 94249

RE: Request to Increase Allocations to the Equal Access Fund

Dear Governor Brown, Senator Hancock, Senator Leno, Assembly Member Melendez, Senator Nielsen, and Assembly Member Weber:

The Legal Aid Association of California joins the California Commission on Access to Justice, California legislators, and others in support of the proposal to increase Equal Access Funds by an additional \$15 million in the revised budget.

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893-3000 [www.LAACOnline.org](http://www.LAACOnline.org)  
[www.CALegalAdvocates.org](http://www.CALegalAdvocates.org)

Founded in 1983, the Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC) is a non-profit organization created for the purpose of ensuring the effective delivery of legal services to low-income and underserved people and families throughout California. LAAC is the statewide membership organization for nearly 90 non-profit legal services organizations in the state.

Our members provide high-quality legal services to our state's most vulnerable people. These services to low-income individuals, seniors, and people with disabilities form an essential safety net in California and often ensure that the programs' clients have access to life's basic necessities, such as food, safe and affordable housing, freedom from violence, health care, employment, economic self-sufficiency, and access to the legal system.

**An increase to the Equal Access Fund is needed now to help address the legal needs of the increasing population of Californians living in poverty. We applaud Senator Wieckowski's efforts to increase support for legal services through the court's Equal Access Fund.**

The Equal Access Fund was established in 1999 with a \$10 million line in the court's budget, a line item *that hasn't increased in those 15 years*, though the total amount has increased due to the addition of filing fees. The Equal Access Fund funds California's legal services organizations and innovative partnerships between legal services and the courts.

The number of Californian who qualify for legal services based on their income has increased by twenty percent during the recent economic crisis. Californians are still facing legal crises relating to the economic downturn, including foreclosure relief scams, homelessness, elder abuse, and domestic violence. Reductions in funding are forcing legal services programs to decrease staffing and services at the exact time that Californians need their assistance more than ever.

Other states have tried to address this increasing need by funding legal services through the court's budget. New York Chief Judge Lippman recently addressed a group of California stakeholders at a meeting at Stanford and shared his pledge to increase New York's current allocation of \$70 million a year to \$100 million a year. Chief Judge Lippman sent the message that legal services are a key component to the safety net and that the courts need legal services programs to help people navigate an intimidating judicial system. California should stand with New York and be models for the rest of the country on how to better serve low-income people in legal crisis.

For these reasons, LAAC strongly supports the proposal to increase the allocation to Equal Access Funds through California's budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Salena Copeland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Salena" being more prominent than the last name "Copeland".

Salena Copeland