

D.C. Council Appropriates \$3.2 Million for Legal Services

The Council of the District of Columbia has included \$3.2 million for public legal services in its budget for the fiscal year that began on October 1. As recommended by the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission, the appropriation is earmarked for civil legal service providers working with poor and underserved District residents.

The funding, which will be administered by the District of Columbia Bar Foundation, has been designated for projects in four different areas. These include providing access to legal services in neglected areas of the District, creating a shared legal interpreter bank for all service providers to draw on when assisting non-English-proficient clients, and offering more legal services in housing-related matters. A portion of the funds will also be used for student loan repayment assistance for lawyers employed by legal service providers under the terms specified by the District of Columbia Poverty Lawyer Loan Assistance Repayment Program Act of 2006.

Created in December 2004 by order of the D.C. Court of Appeals, the Access to Justice Commission raises awareness of the need for availability of justice for all. It was specifically tasked with ensuring access to high-quality legal assistance for low- and moderate-income D.C. residents, who have traditionally had greater difficulty taking advantage of the civil justice system.

The commission's 17 members include judges from the D.C. Court of Appeals and Superior Court, community leaders, and executive directors of three leading legal service providers.

"By providing this funding, the District government has recognized the vital role of civil legal services in helping vulnerable District residents to solve problems that have a tremendous impact on their daily lives," said Access to Justice Commission Chair Peter Edelman in a written statement.

"With poverty on the rise in the District, however, much remains to be done. The commission will continue its collaborative efforts with the District government and organizations throughout the city to ensure that all residents have equal access to justice."

For more details on the D.C. Access to Justice Commission, contact Executive Director Sunil Mansukhani at 202-344-4441 or sunil.mansukhani@dcaccesstojustice.org. —J.R.