

March 1, 2006

The Honorable Linda W. Cropp
Chair
City Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

The Honorable Phil Mendelson
Chair, Judiciary Committee
City Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mrs. Cropp and Mr. Mendelson:

We, the undersigned, have served as past Presidents of the District of Columbia Bar. The Bar has over 80,000 attorneys, approximately 30,000 of whom work in the District. We are writing to encourage you to support the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission's request for the District government to provide \$6.2 million in the fiscal year 2007 budget for civil legal services. This funding will provide critical support for thousands of low-income District residents.

During our terms as President, each of us sought to mobilize the resources of the private bar to meet the basic legal needs of the poorest members of our community. We encouraged attorneys in private practice to do additional *pro bono* work, fostered creative partnerships between law firms and legal services providers, and worked with the courts to make them more accessible to District residents. Despite our best efforts, and the dedicated work of legal services providers, a 2003 study by the D.C. Bar Foundation indicates that only about 10% of low-income residents' legal needs are met.

In response to these critical unmet legal needs, the D.C. Bar joined with the D.C. Bar Foundation and the D.C. Consortium of Legal Services Providers in asking the District of Columbia Court of Appeals to create the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission. The Commission, which began its work last year, is a blue-ribbon panel comprised of Court of Appeals and Superior Court judges, past Presidents of the D.C. Bar, law professors, Executive Directors of legal services providers, and other community leaders. The Commission has engaged in extensive consultations to determine the areas in which additional funding will have the greatest impact.

District funding in the areas identified by the Commission – additional lawyers for housing-related matters and in underserved areas of the District of Columbia, as well as the creation of a shared legal interpreter bank – will generate immediate results. Due to this financial assistance, many long-time residents will be able to remain in their homes rather than be unjustly forced out. Thousands of others will receive legal services in their neighborhood so they do not have to face a critical legal problem by themselves. This funding will also allow residents who do not speak English well to receive quality interpreter services so that they can access the justice system on the same terms as everyone else.

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We recognize that providing for our most vulnerable residents is a shared responsibility between the private and public sector. Forty-three states, including Maryland and Virginia, provide financial support for civil legal services that totaled over \$160 million last year. In the District, it is estimated that private lawyers provide \$15 million in *pro bono* legal services annually. While we strongly believe the Bar can and should increase its already substantial contribution of *pro bono* work and funding, we call on the District government to supplement the private efforts that are already in place. The Commission has provided the District government with a roadmap on how the government can do its share. We hope you will accept the Commission's recommendations and provide the necessary financial support.

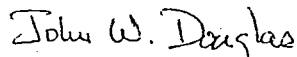
Should you have any questions or wish any additional information from us, please communicate with Sunil H. Mansukhani, Executive Director, District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission, c/o Venable LLP, 575 Seventh Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20004, (202) 344-4441, Sunil.Mansukhani@dcaccesstojustice.org, who will bring your inquiries or requests to our attention.

Thank you for considering this request.

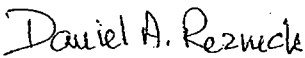
Sincerely,



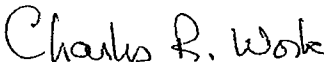
E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr.
Bar President (1972-73)



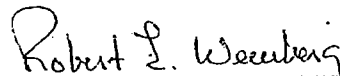
John W. Douglas *by SSP*
Bar President (1974-75)



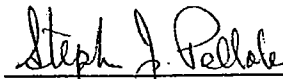
Daniel A. Reznick *by SSP*
Bar President (1975-76)



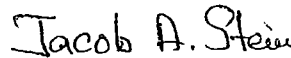
Charles R. Work *by SSP*
Bar President (1976-77)



Robert L. Weinberg *by SSP*
Bar President (1978-79)



Stephen J. Pollak
Bar President (1980-81)



Jacob A. Stein *by SSP*
Bar President (1982-83)



David B. Isbell *by SSP*
Bar President (1983-84)

