



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 112th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 158

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2012

No. 165

Senate

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I want to congratulate Maryland Legal Services Corporation on their 30th anniversary. Established in 1982 by the Maryland General Assembly, Maryland Legal Services Corporation raises and distributes funds to nonprofit organizations that provide civil legal assistance to low-income persons.

As chairman of Maryland Legal Services Corporation from 1988-1995, I know firsthand the extraordinary service they provide to Marylanders. Maryland Legal Services Corporation's grants have enabled 35 Maryland-area nonprofits to assist individuals in matters such as eviction, foreclosure, domestic violence, child custody, veteran's benefits, and health care. To date, Maryland Legal Services Corporation has awarded more than \$164 million in grants, assisting Marylanders in 2 million different legal matters.

In recent years Maryland Legal Services Corporation's mission has become even more critical, as more and more people have turned to our nonprofit community for civil legal services. Studies have shown that poor households will on average face from 1 to 3 legal problems a year, and Maryland is fortunate that Maryland Legal Services Corporation has worked tirelessly to ensure that our nonprofit civil legal service providers can assist its clients.

In the Western part of our State, a couple who were 2 months behind on their mortgage and close to foreclosure was provided a volunteer attorney from Allegany Law Foundation who helped them save their home.

In Harford County, Legal Aid successfully advocated for a woman who was being sued by her credit card company after she had paid thousands of dollars to a debt settlement company believing that the company would pay off her credit card debt. Legal Aid helped her cancel her contract, get a refund and have the lawsuit dismissed.

A man on the Eastern Shore contacted his local Maryland Legal Aid Bureau with concerns about black mold that was growing in his rental unit. The landlord refused to remedy the mold situation, so Legal Aid staff investigated the situation and helped the man escrow his rent.

Had these Marylanders not had access to civil legal assistance, what would have happened? I submit that inevitably justice suffers. Judges are put in the position of trying to provide some assistance and advice--while remaining impartial--to one or two unrepresented parties before them. Social service agencies absorb additional costs from those that are unfairly denied health care or social services benefits. Neighborhoods and communities are damaged due to unjust evictions. Families are torn apart, and domestic violence and abuse continues unabated. Public health and law enforcement costs rise. The rule of law is undermined, and Americans come to believe that justice is only for the rich, not the poor.

According to one study, each Legal Aid attorney serves over 6,800 people, while there is one private attorney for every 525 people in the nation. This is not "Equal Justice Under Law", as promised by the etching at the entrance to the United States Supreme Court. I am committed to help close the justice gap by giving the Federal Legal Services Corporation the resources it needs from Congress. This must include increasing its authorized level of funding and removing harmful funding restrictions regarding class action lawsuits and attorneys fees.

Maryland Legal Services Corporation's successes over the last 30 years are impressive, and while we celebrate all they have been able to do, we also recommit ourselves to ensuring that all people have access to quality legal representation, regardless of income.