

Resolution In Support of the Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid

WHEREAS, **civil legal aid programs** in Louisiana have sustained a significant drop in state and federal funding and poverty in Louisiana has increased significantly over the last 6 years, causing more Louisianans to be in need of civil legal aid, as demonstrated by the following facts:

- (1) Unavoidable cuts in (IOLTA) funding of civil legal services for the poorest Louisiana citizens have occurred due to a 74 percent decrease in interest rates on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) funds between 2007 and 2011;
- (2) Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the largest single donor nationally for civil legal aid, has seen funding per eligible client drop by almost 60 percent over the past decade;
- (3) Louisiana's civil legal aid programs have lost more than a third of their LSC funding over the last five years;
- (4) Louisiana's poverty rates are among the nation's highest, 19.9 percent compared to 15.9 percent nationally. Nearly one in five Louisianans lived in poverty last year, the third highest rate in the nation. That includes more than 300,000 children, 28 percent; the fourth highest rate in the nation;

WHEREAS, declines in funding combined with Louisiana's high poverty rate overwhelm the limited staff and resources of civil legal aid offices, which undermine the ability of low-income citizens to access the civil justice system, burden state agencies, local pro bono programs and resources and place Louisiana's already challenged legal aid system in crisis;

WHEREAS, assistance from local and specialty bar associations is critical to maintaining and developing resources that will provide low-income Louisiana citizens meaningful access to the justice system;

WHEREAS, in January 2014, the Louisiana State Bar Association and Louisiana Bar Foundation, together with other key Louisiana legal service organizations, united to launch and promote a statewide effort, the ***Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid***. The mission of the Campaign is to spread awareness and increase the resources available to address the critical need for civil legal aid in Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, the House of Delegates of the Louisiana Bar Association; the Board of Governors of the Louisiana State Bar Association; and Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court Bernette J. Johnson, have declared their ongoing support for the ***Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid*** to increase awareness and funding resources so that all Louisiana citizens have equal access to justice and high quality legal representation;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Association for Women Attorneys:

- (1) Acknowledges the importance equal access to justice plays in the perception of fairness of the justice system and that programs providing civil legal aid to low-income Louisiana citizens are a fundamental component of such access;
- (2) Agrees to actively participate in the efforts of the **Louisiana Campaign to Preserve Civil Legal Aid** through all available resources, as well as by encouraging its members to contribute financially to the *Campaign*;
- (3) Further agrees to encourage its members to support civil legal services programs through enhanced pro bono work.

Respectfully Submitted,

THE ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN ATTORNEYS