

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

WSBA Resolution re 2017-19 Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan

Whereas, access to the civil justice system and the ability to secure fair outcomes for all Washingtonians regardless of income, race, gender, language, age and other characteristics are core commitments of the state's legal system; and

Whereas, the 2015 Washington State Civil Legal Needs Study, commissioned by the Washington State Supreme Court, shows significant disparities in the experiences of low-income Washington residents dealing with legal issues. In particular, more than 75 percent of low-income Washingtonians do not receive any legal assistance; and more than 60 percent of Study respondents who are low-income, expressed limited trust and/or confidence with the state civil justice system; and

Whereas, the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) is part of the judicial branch, exercising a governmental function authorized by the Washington Supreme Court to license the state's approximately 39,000 legal professionals; that WSBA's mission is to serve the public and members of the Bar, ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice; and that WSBA is committed to equal justice under the law.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Washington State Bar Association Board of Governors:

1. Accepts the findings of the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study and recognizes the civil legal problems experienced by low-income Washington residents are disproportionate; acknowledges that there is a systemic lack of access to necessary legal assistance to help Washington residents solve important civil legal problems and that these problems must be addressed; is committed to continued discussions and cooperative partnerships with any and all stakeholders to identify appropriate solutions; and
2. Supports the following policy elements contained in the 2017-19 Civil Justice Reinvestment Plan developed by the Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid:
 - Expand the ability of low-income Washingtonians to self-diagnose their legal problems including self-referrals by accessing appropriate legal tools and resources;
 - Expand volunteer delivery of civil legal aid services across the state;
 - Achieve minimum access client service capacity of one full-time equivalent legal aid attorney to every 5,000 people at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level;
 - Ensure effective support for high-quality legal assistance and assessment of the impact of increased state investment in state-funded civil legal aid services; and
3. Recognizes the state's significant budgetary constraints, but does not support funding these critical civil legal aid services through a dedicated surcharge or tax on outside legal services; further, we do not support funding these services through a tax, surcharge and/or fee on legal professionals, clients or residents of Washington; and
4. Respectfully requests that the Washington State Legislature appropriate necessary general-fund state dollars to meet emergent legal needs as civil legal aid remains a core governmental function of the Washington state civil justice system.

Unanimously adopted by the Washington State Bar Association Board of Governors on November 18, 2016.

Paula C. Littlewood

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Executive Director