



Federal Policy

Updated September 2009

Recommendations for 2009 and Beyond

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) has developed an extensive federal policy agenda for President Obama and the 111th Congress directed at improving the lives of low income people. These proposals are separate from our proposals for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), although they overlap with proposals we made for the ARRA and may augment provisions enacted therein.

The Obama Administration and the 111th Congress face many challenges including health care reform and climate change legislation. Our proposals focus on three challenges:

First, far too many children are not safe and well-cared for, and far too many live in areas of concentrated, persistent poverty. Far too many families lack the basic supports they need to help their children grow up healthy, secure, and prepared to succeed. It is time to make an increased investment in effective programs and funding streams that concretely help children, youth, and families thrive.

Second, our safety net is not working. It is a patchwork of outmoded, uncoordinated policies that leave out too many vulnerable people. It often fails to meet basic needs, reward work, or strengthen families and communities. It is crisis-driven rather than prevention-focused. We need a strong and modernized safety net that includes a system of benefits that is easy to access, unstigmatized and responsive to economic hardship, open to immigrants, and fully funded. And we need a continuum of preventive family-support services that reduce the need for more intensive services. Such a safety net will lead to adults who can contribute to society and the economy, and children and youth who are equipped to learn and achieve their full potential—bolstering individuals and families who face heightened risk in a global economy.

Third, far too many working families earn low wages. Many workers earn wages that leave their families at or below the poverty line. Our nation's prosperity is not being adequately shared with working families, and for too many working families prosperity is fragile and not permanent. Today's job market is filled with poor quality jobs, many offering little opportunity for advancement. Our nation is not equipping workers with skills to succeed or to serve the needs of employers in a changing economy. It is time to build supportive pathways to good jobs that sustain families and communities, and to ensure that better jobs are available for everyone seeking work. We need to improve the skills and incomes of low-income youth and adults, and build pathways to reconnect our more vulnerable and disconnected individuals—high school dropouts, ex-offenders, returning veterans, low-skilled immigrants. In addition, we need to create more equitable labor markets, not only with respect to wages but also with respect to work schedules, leave and sick pay.

To address these fundamental policy challenges CLASP developed an agenda for President Obama and his White House Offices, for the Congress, and for the many federal departments and agencies that work on policies and programs that directly affect low-income people. We call upon the Obama Administration and Congress to commit to the following 11 steps:

Cut Poverty

Commit to cutting poverty in our nation by 50 percent within 10 years, overhaul the federal poverty measure, and create measures to address issues of well-being beyond income status.

The United States is a powerful and wealthy nation. Yet, 37 million people live in poverty. Many millions more hover near poverty and struggle to make ends meet. Other developed nations do far better in addressing

poverty and providing opportunity. We can too. If we take steps to dramatically reduce poverty in our midst we will be better off. The more we reduce poverty, the better we realize our shared American values of fairness and opportunity; and, when we lower poverty we can achieve greater prosperity. That's because adults who grew up in impoverished homes contribute less to the nation's economic engine. The productivity potential of the individual, the strength of the family, and the prosperity of our nation increase as we cut poverty. CLASP recommends a concerted federal effort to ensure we maximize our human capital and foster strong families.

First, Congress and the Obama Administration should commit to cut poverty by 50 percent within 10 years. It is feasible to achieve a dramatic reduction in U.S. poverty levels. Establishing a national target—a numerical goal with a deadline—creates a shared vision that poverty is a priority that must be tackled. An effective target draws ongoing political and public attention to whether, and how much, progress has been made at different points within the deadline. Thus, the target serves as a tool to propel policy solutions and investments that cut poverty. Analysis by the Center for American Progress (CAP) demonstrates, for example, that a 26 percent cut in poverty can be accomplished through improvements in four areas: minimum wage, EITC, child tax credits, and child care subsidies. Adding other policies could readily facilitate a 50 percent cut according to the analysis.

Second, the federal government should overhaul the official poverty measure to develop a truer picture of poverty. The current federal measure of poverty is antiquated in a variety of ways. The threshold is set too low and leaves out too many people who seriously struggle to make ends meet. The measure also is based on an old 1960s formula built around short-term, emergency food budgets; it needs to be updated to reflect new expenses (*e.g.* child care) and new sources of income (*e.g.* EITC). Until the measure is updated, the real costs today's families face daily (*e.g.* housing and utilities) are not adequately considered when determining poverty. Similarly, until such time, benefits that families receive from certain policies (*e.g.* EITC or child care subsidies) will not be reflected in the poverty

rate. A better federal poverty measure would be a major forward step, since, as the National Academy of Sciences noted in its 1995 recommendations for change, the current measure is “demonstrably flawed.” At the same time, new types of measures, including those which provide relative poverty status and geographic differences in poverty, are also needed to more fully appreciate the extent and nature of poverty in the U.S.

Third, the federal government should identify and create measures to address issues of well-being beyond income status. Poverty, by definition, is reduced with an increase in income. Yet those who are poor and those neighborhoods that are impoverished are disproportionately challenged by a lack of quality institutions and services. The well-being of those who are poor and those who reside in poor neighborhoods is in part a function of available services—from schools to family services, and more. Thus, efforts to reduce poverty should also seek to improve well-being, and progress on these outcomes (*e.g.* adult literacy and family strengthening) should be measured. The next administration should provide technical assistance to states to identify such outcome measures and provide leadership to assess new measures. This assistance would enable states and the nation to capture improvements that build prosperity but do not immediately translate into income gains, as an integral part of poverty reduction efforts.

Improve Child Care

Create a guarantee for child care for all families at or below 200 percent of poverty and include substantial new funds to help states improve the quality of child care and to remove barriers to access for underserved families.

With four out of 10 children under age 6 living in low-income households (under 200 percent of poverty) and facing multiple risk factors that affect their chances for success in later life, investments in young children are increasingly important. Decades of research confirm that high-quality child care and early education can improve outcomes for children, particularly low-income children. High-quality early learning experiences, which support the full range of children's development,

promote child well-being and help build solid foundations for future learning and success in life. Parents also benefit when they have access to reliable, affordable quality child care that allows them to work to support their families. Research shows that investments in child care assistance make a significant difference in the economic health and security of families by helping families move out of poverty, sustain their participation in the workforce, and limit instability in care arrangements that can impact work.

Across the country business leaders, economists, neuroscientists, researchers, and policy experts alike have championed the importance of investing in quality early childhood programs for our nation's youngest children. From longitudinal studies showing positive outcomes for children into adulthood, to economic impact studies, a broad consensus of support for early investments has emerged. Yet few children have access to the help they need: only one in seven federally-eligible children receives child care assistance, approximately half of eligible children are receiving Head Start services, and only 3 percent of eligible children participate in Early Head Start. Current rules in states make it difficult for families to get and keep child care assistance—some studies suggest that many families maintain their assistance for as few as three months at a time. Yet, even when families get help paying for child care, there is very little high quality care available, especially for infants and toddlers, children with special needs, families in rural areas, and those living in very poor communities.

Using the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant as a vehicle for change, Congress and the Obama Administration should act to create a guarantee for child care assistance to all working families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. This will guarantee a stable funding stream for states and will eliminate long waiting lists in many states, as well as eliminate the many different eligibility rules and requirements that exist. It will also make it easier for families to access and maintain the child care assistance they need to work.

At the same time, federal policymakers can signal a real commitment to supporting the healthy development of

young children by substantially increasing investments in Head Start and Early Head Start; helping states expand their investments in quality initiatives, such as those that increase training, education, and compensation for all caregivers; expanding licensing requirements and increasing monitoring to ensure that all children in care are safe; increasing access to screening and developmental assessments; and targeting assistance to children and providers who are limited English proficient.

Improve Child Support

Reverse the funding cut to the child support program and require the distribution of all child support collected to families and children.

The child support program is an essential family support program intended to ensure families' self-sufficiency by making child support a more reliable source of income. Child support both reduces child poverty and is the backbone of family budgets of poor families. The program serves 17 million children and collects \$25 billion every year in support paid for children by their non-custodial parents. The program secures more cash to more working families than almost any other family assistance program—of the \$25 billion collected, \$23 billion in private child support payments goes to working families every year. However, the effectiveness of the child support program has been jeopardized by a 20 percent cut in federal funds included in the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005. The ARRA restored these cuts but only through September 30, 2010. If these cuts continue after that date, the Congressional Budget Office projects that \$11 billion in support will go uncollected over the next 10 years. Therefore it is critical that the Administration and Congress continue the restoration of the 20 percent DRA child support funding cut and permanently increase child support program funding.

Originally, the child support program was established to recover state and federal welfare costs, and the state continues to withhold \$2 billion in support payments owed to current and former TANF families. *All* collected child support should go to families and children. The incentive to pay child support is greater when non-

custodial parents know that their payment is going to their child, rather than being retained by the state. To be a truly effective family support program, the Obama Administration, Congress and other federal policymakers should mandate full family distribution and eliminate cost recovery policies in the federal TANF and foster care programs.

Assist Low-Income Fathers

Adopt realistic child support policies for low-income, non-custodial fathers and expand assistance to low-income fathers to strengthen families.

Compliance with support orders is strongly linked to ability to pay. Yet, because of state policies and practices, low-income fathers, including those that leave prison, often have child support orders that do not reflect their ability to pay. Parents who cannot keep up with their child support obligations fall deeply into debt. Fathers who see no end in sight to their child support debt have fewer reasons to maintain steady employment in the formal economy, to comply with their orders in the future, or to cooperate with the child support system—particularly when their children will not see the money. Parents who comply with realistic child support obligations are more likely to remain employed and have stronger family relationships. Therefore, the Obama Administration should lead the effort to adopt realistic child support policies for the lowest income fathers that will help make work pay, including early intervention processes; fair orders; more reasonable income withholding levels; more effective modification procedures; and debt reduction policies.

We simply have failed to set up effective systems for delivery of services to low-income fathers in the communities in which they reside. Low-income fathers have limited access to EITC, TANF, and publicly-funded health coverage; are often disconnected from domestic violence and marriage programs; and are not engaged in child welfare placement decisions. The Obama Administration and Congress should expand funding to programs that help low-income men get jobs to support themselves and their children; expand community-based service delivery capacity to assist low-income fathers; build a network of work supports for

low-income fathers, including expanding access to and increasing the benefits under the EITC and integrate family assistance programs to make benefits and services available to fathers as well as mothers.

Improve the Child Welfare System

Improve the child welfare system so that we do as much to prevent child abuse and neglect as we do to ameliorate the harm of such maltreatment.

Over the last decade, nearly 1 million children have been substantiated as abused or neglected each year. Yet, this is only the tip of the iceberg. The true incidence of maltreatment is estimated to be up to three times higher. Beyond the immediate physical and psychological trauma of maltreatment, children suffer a host of problems long into adulthood. They are at greater risk of alcohol and drug abuse, depression, suicide attempts, unintended pregnancy, intimate partner violence, sexually transmitted diseases, fetal deaths, smoking, ischemic heart disease, liver disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Children who have been in foster care, including those who “age out” of foster care upon turning 18, typically attain fewer years of education and have less steady employment. Not surprisingly then, they are more likely to experience homelessness and poverty and to be involved with the criminal justice system. These outcomes are problematic not just for the individuals who experience them, but for the nation as a whole. The United States spends more than \$100 billion *annually* on the direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment. We must do better.

The capacity to serve even those whose maltreatment is detected is sorely lacking. Of those children whose abuse is reported and substantiated, nearly 40 percent get *no services at all*—not foster care, not counseling, not family supports. Those who get services often get inadequate support. The bulk of federal child welfare expenditures provide out-of-home care rather than prevention and early intervention services that could keep children safely with their families. Even the support for children removed from their homes is insufficient. Only about half the children in foster care receive federal foster care payments. Only a quarter of them receive mental health services—despite the fact

that at least half have clinically significant emotional or behavioral problems. The typical child welfare worker—a person often making life and death decisions—has less than two years experience and often carries twice the recommended caseload, preventing even the most dedicated worker from spending sufficient time with children and families to identify and address the challenges they face.

Fortunately, research, as well as state and local practice, provides a foundation upon which to build. Scaling up to ensure that all children are safe and loved, and that their basic needs are met will require federal investment and leadership, however. The Obama Administration and Congress must: increase prevention and early intervention services that help keep children and families out of crisis; increase specialized treatment services for those children and families that do experience crisis; increase services to support families after a crisis has stabilized (including birth families, as well as kinship and adoptive families created when parents are unable to care for their children); enhance the quality of the workforce providing services to children and families; and improve accountability both for dollars spent and outcomes achieved. We must strengthen our response to child maltreatment. We must provide treatment services and effective interventions for all children who experience abuse and neglect. However, we must simultaneously enhance our capacity to prevent maltreatment from occurring in the first place.

Improve Workforce Education and Training Programs

Transform and fund at a scale comparable to the GI Bill workforce education and training programs to help low-skill, low-income individuals advance economically, increase our nation's productivity, and secure a better future for children.

A strong workforce and education system is critical to ensuring that low-income individuals are able to secure stable employment in jobs that pay family supporting wages, and that American businesses have access to workers with the skills they need in order to compete in the global economy. Unfortunately, the current system is too fragmented and underfunded to accomplish these

goals. The Obama Administration and Congress should align adult education, job training, and higher education policies to create pathways to the postsecondary educational credentials that are increasingly the door to the middle class, and stable employment in jobs that pay family sustaining wages. Workforce development, economic development, and community development should also be aligned to ensure that low-income populations benefit from the engines of economic growth and share in our nation's prosperity.

Through reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act, English as a Second Language (ESL) and GED-oriented adult education programs should be refocused on promoting transitions to postsecondary education and training; and workforce investment programs that currently emphasize rapid labor market attachment should be refocused on developing education and training pathways from low-wage to high-skilled jobs and implementing holistic programs such as transitional jobs programs that help individuals address barriers to employment and get connected to jobs. Federal policies should enhance the capacity of institutions and providers to foster community partnerships and to promote connections to necessary income and other supports that enable low-income youth and adults to succeed in education, training, and work.

Program transformation should be coupled with vastly increased investment in reauthorized workforce and education programs. The Obama Administration and Congress should put adult education funding on a long-term path that substantially expands capacity to meet growing need, especially for ESL services; and increase funding for the Pell Grant program to more fully cover college costs and living expenses for the lowest-income students. In addition, the federal government should dedicate a portion of new federal investments in infrastructure, transportation, the environment, and health care to creating training opportunities for low-income populations so that they are prepared to access the newly created jobs.

Improve Job Quality

Provide government leadership to improve job quality through wages, benefits, paid leave, and predictable and

responsive schedules so that workers can meet both work and family responsibilities and advance to meet new challenges.

While skills development is essential for advancing the prospects of low-skill individuals, by itself it is insufficient to expand economic opportunity for low-wage workers and their families. We need to compliment efforts to provide education and training so individuals can access better jobs with efforts to overcome discrimination in the labor market, improve bad jobs, and to expand the number of good jobs that provide workers with decent wages, benefits, working conditions, a safe and healthy environment, opportunities for advancement, and work-life balance. Currently, too many jobs in America pay low wages, offer little opportunity for advancement, and lack benefits and workplace flexibility. The prevalence of poor quality jobs is a critical issue that deserves government attention.

The Obama Administration should make it a top priority to improve the quality of work for all workers, with a special focus on low wage workers, since poor quality jobs are especially prevalent in the low wage labor market. In 2005, one in four workers was working in poverty level jobs. The Obama Administration should use the bully pulpit to talk about job quality as important to American dream, and a compliment to a high road economic growth strategy that will keep America competitive. It should also offer a legislative package aimed at improving jobs, which would include a minimum labor standard that mandates paid sick days, paid family and medical leave, expansions of Family Medical Leave Act to include employers with fewer than 50 employees and expanded purposes for which paid leave may be used. The Administration should support enactment of the Employee Free Choice Act, and index the minimum wage to median wages. In addition, jobs created through federal investment in infrastructure, the environment and other areas should meet certain job quality standards and be subject to targeted hiring requirements. The Obama Administration should also establish a presidential commission aimed at ensuring equitable treatment of part time workers regarding pay, benefits and advancement, workplace flexibility, and improving low-wage work. Finally, the Administration

should create a “Job Quality Czar” at the Department of Labor whose responsibility it will be to work across agencies to improve job quality, make recommendations to policy makers about further legislative action to improve job quality, and report to Congress and the Administration about progress made.

Reconnect Disconnected Youth

Invest in building the youth service delivery capacity in communities of high youth distress to reconnect disconnected youth.

The cycle of intergenerational poverty is perpetuated by the continued challenge of millions of youth who are dropping out of high school and disconnecting from the education and labor market mainstreams, with many falling into harms way. One in three youth—and more than 50 percent of minority youth—who start high school will not graduate four years later. Each year nearly a half million youth drop out and join the approximately 3.8 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are out of school and out of work. This problem disproportionately impacts low income minority communities where youth unemployment is extremely high, where gang participation and youth violence is on the rise, and where approximately one-third of all young black men are involved with the criminal justice system. As children get older, there are fewer and fewer meaningful opportunities for engagement in programs that build their skills and prepare them for the future. Left on their own, many fall prey to the ills of their communities. In past decades, there was substantial investment in the youth delivery system that provided opportunities for education credentialing, training, work experience and support for these youth to help them get back on track. The federal youth programs and supports have been all but dismantled over the past 10 years through the withdrawal of federal funding and support. Thus there are very few pathways that will reconnect these youth to the education, training, and support that they will need to become engaged citizens, responsible parents, and skilled workers.

A signal from President Obama and the Administration about the importance of both preventive strategies and

meaningful re-engagement of those youth who are being left behind in the economy can provide visibility and urgency to this issue and can serve to rally all levels of government and sectors of the community to actively engage in an effort of outreaching to and reconnecting disconnected youth and putting supports in place in communities of high youth distress to keep youth on the path to graduation, prepared for postsecondary success. Changing the landscape for the millions of disengaged and disconnected youth will require substantially increased federal investment. There are specific actions that an Obama Administration and Congress can take to elevate priority and expand investment in programming for this population.

First, Congress should re-establish the Federal Youth Development Council, which was created in federal statute but was never implemented, have it report to a White House director of Youth Policy, and charge it with the responsibility of advancing strategies for solving the problems youth face in the context of our emerging global economy. Second, the Administration, working with Congress, should provide federal funding to help build the youth service delivery capacity in communities of high youth distress. Similar to the Youth Opportunity Grant Program established under the Workforce Investment Act this effort should help communities align their education and youth serving systems and put programs in place, at scale, that connect youth to alternative education, training, work experience, postsecondary opportunities and jobs. Third, the Administration should look to the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act as a vehicle for: increasing accountability at the secondary level to increase graduation rates; incenting states and local districts to engage community and business in structuring educational pathways that align with 21st century workforce needs; and expanding the supplemental supports and afterschool interventions especially at the middle school level to create a community-based continuum to support student success. Fourth, federal investment should be greatly expanded to support opportunities for work experience, internships, transitional jobs and civic engagement opportunities for youth. This should include funding to local and regional partnerships that engage business, workforce and education systems in creating pathways and bridge

programs to prepare out of school youth for high-skill, high-wage career opportunities.

Improve TANF and Expand Work Supports

Improve the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF) and other safety net programs so that all families have necessary works supports and TANF focuses on positive outcomes for families and reducing poverty.

From 1996, the year when TANF replaced AFDC, to 2004, the share of eligible families receiving assistance from the program fell by half, from 84 percent to 42 percent. Over that same period, the real value of the basic TANF block grant has declined 28 percent due to inflation. The share of single mothers who are employed has increased dramatically, but they have joined a labor market full of low-wage jobs that do not provide enough income to make ends meet, jobs that often force workers to choose between their jobs and their responsibilities as parents. Work supports help bridge the gap between labor market income and basic needs, but too many working families are denied assistance due to funding limitations or barriers to participation, or lose benefits before their paychecks are enough to cover their needs. At the same time, the share of low-income single mothers who neither work nor receive cash assistance has grown steadily, and is now more than 20 percent.

President Obama should appoint a commission to evaluate the full range of work-support/safety net programs, identify the gaps and ways to improve them. Because many of the “disconnected” appear to be falling in the gap between a work-focused TANF program and the requirement that individuals be completely and permanently unable to work in order to qualify for SSI, a subgroup should focus on the specific needs of individuals with disabilities.

TANF will need to be reauthorized in 2010. The last reauthorization, part of the Deficit Reduction Act, forced states to focus almost exclusively on meeting a strict work participation requirement for families receiving assistance. The Bush Administration has used both regulations and sub-regulatory guidance to further restrict state flexibility. In particular, these policies have

made it hard for states to allow recipients to participate in education and training, or to make appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities, as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Therefore, the Obama Administration should lead an effort as part of TANF reauthorization to give states more flexibility to develop welfare-to-work programs that meet the needs of a diverse group of recipients, engage participants in skill-building activities, and shift the focus from work participation rates to outcomes and poverty reduction. The Obama Administration should solicit both written feedback and participation at town meetings or listening sessions, with explicit and visible invitations to states and advocates to participate, leading up to development of principles and a vision for reauthorization.

Use the Tax System to Enhance Supports for Low-Income People

Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit and make other tax credits refundable so that low-income families can benefit from them.

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant shift toward providing work supports for low-income families through the tax system, rather than as public benefits. At over \$40 billion, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is now the largest single source of cash or near-cash assistance to low-income working families.

Tax credits have two significant advantages over public benefit programs. From a political perspective, it is often easier to win bipartisan support for expanding tax credits than for public benefits. And from the recipient's perspective, it is less time consuming and stigmatized to apply for and receive tax credits. This does not mean that all benefit programs should be replaced by tax credits: public benefits are more responsive to families' changing circumstances and better meet immediate needs. Tax credits and public benefits are thus complementary approaches to supporting low-income families.

While the EITC has become a major source of income support for low-income families, and is credited for

significantly increasing work among low-income single mothers, non-custodial parents and other workers without dependent children are only eligible for a small credit. This credit is denied entirely to such workers who are under than 25 years old. The EITC for this population should be increased in order to reward work and reduce poverty.

Most tax credits that are not targeted to low-income workers are not refundable, meaning that individuals and families who do not owe federal income taxes are not eligible for them. This makes these credits regressive, and denies their incentives to low-income workers and families. Tax credits including the Dependent Care Tax Credit, the Savers Credit, and the higher education tax credits should be made refundable. The Child Tax Credit should be made fully refundable.

Expand and Improve Civil Legal Assistance

Increase the LSC 2009 appropriation to \$440 million and substantially increase LSC appropriations in subsequent years to reach \$750 million; eliminate the 1996 restrictions imposed on LSC grantees; appoint a new Board of Directors for LSC that supports these priorities and improves the quality of civil legal assistance.

Civil legal assistance for low-income people is crucial to ensure our nation's promise of "equal justice under the law." Legal aid is crucially important to ensure fundamental fairness as well as to dealing with the specific legal issues faced by low-income people in areas including family stability and domestic violence, housing, consumer, health, employment and income supports, and racial equity. Studies have shown that of all the support services available to victims of domestic violence, only access to legal assistance decreases the likelihood that women will be battered again.

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is the principle funder for civil legal aid programs throughout the country. Funding for LSC reached a high of \$400 million in 1995, before it was cut by 30 percent, at the same time that Congress imposed significant new restrictions on the programs that received LSC funding. These restrictions, which placed severe limitations on

the ability of LSC grantees to fully serve the legal needs of the low-income community, have remained on LSC appropriations over the last 12 years, as funding has stagnated or risen only slightly, reaching just \$390 million in FY 2009. If appropriations had just kept pace with inflation, based on its 1980 level of \$300 million, LSC funding would have now reached \$750 million.

In 2005, LSC conducted a groundbreaking study demonstrating a huge “Justice Gap” between resources available to support legal assistance and the need for legal services. The “Justice Gap” study showed that because of a lack of funding, legal services grantees turned away more than 50 percent of the eligible applicants who actually sought services and more than 80 percent of the low-income people in this country who experienced legal needs were unable to access the services necessary to resolve their problems.

For FY 2010, The Obama Administration has proposed a \$45 million increase to \$435 million. Congress has yet to act on the FY 2010 appropriation for LSC. We urge the Congress to appropriate at least the amount the President recommended or higher. The Obama Administration and the supporters of LSC in Congress must work together to insure that over the next several years LSC funding levels will continue to increase significantly in order to close the “Justice Gap.” In addition, the Obama Administration should continue to lead the effort to eliminate the restrictions imposed in 1996 on LSC grantees to enable them to fully serve the legal needs of their clients. Finally, the Obama Administration should complete the appointment of the bi-partisan LSC Board who will support these priorities and continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of LSC-funded programs. Only then will low-income people be assured equal access to justice.

CONCLUSION

We need an America where children grow up safe, healthy, nurtured, and prepared to succeed; where young people and adults have the skills and supports they need to fulfill their potential and to contribute to society and the economy; where jobs provide decent wages and family friendly policies; where poverty is rare; where

there is justice for all; and where all people can participate equally and their communities can prosper. To achieve such an America will not be easy but it can be done. Therefore, CLASP calls upon the Obama Administration and Congress to reduce poverty, invest in effective programs and funding streams that help children, youth and families thrive, create a strong and modernized safety net and build supportive pathways to good jobs for low-income youths and adults