STATE OF TEXAS

RESOLUTION

of the

TEXAS JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Supporting Funding for Civil Legal Aid in Texas

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council is the policymaking body for the Texas Judicial Branch, created under chapter 71, Texas Government Code; and

WHEREAS, the Council is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council embraces the principles that our nation promises justice for all, not just for those who can afford to pay for it; and

WHEREAS, the most recent U.S. Census reports that more than 5.6 million Texans qualify for civil legal aid; and

WHEREAS, low-income Texans are often the most vulnerable in our communities, including veterans, the elderly, persons with disabilities and mental health needs, and victims of domestic abuse; and for many disadvantaged Texans access to legal help might be all that stands between them and homelessness, health, safety, and income to provide food on their table and shelter for their children; and

WHEREAS, the Texas Access to Justice Foundation was created by Supreme Court Order in 1984 to administer the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program to fund nonprofit organizations that provide free civil legal aid to low-income Texans; and

WHEREAS, historically low interest rates have dramatically reduced funding for the IOLTA program from $20.1 million in 2007 to approximately $4 million in 2014, an 80 percent loss in funding since 2007; and

WHEREAS, Texas ranks 50th in access to legal aid lawyers, with approximately one legal aid lawyer for every 11,000 Texans who qualify for legal aid services, a fact exacerbated by Texas legal aid providers having been forced to lay off staff and cut services due to declines in funding, resulting in thousands of Texans being denied critical, life-changing legal representation.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council supports the Supreme Court of Texas' appropriations request for basic civil legal services funding from the Texas Legislature and supports the Texas Access to Justice Commission and Foundation proposals for additional funding for basic civil legal services.

Honorable Nathan L. Hecht
Chair, Texas Judicial Council

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