



LEGAL AID OF THE BLUEGRASS

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Ms. Janet LaBella
Director
Office of Program Performance
Legal Services Corporation
333 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007-3522

RE: LSC Program Quality Visit April 13-17, 2015
Northern Kentucky Legal Aid, Inc. d/b/a Legal Aid of the Bluegrass
Recipient No.

Dear Ms. LaBella:

On behalf of Legal Aid of the Bluegrass (LABG), I want to thank all of the members of the Program Quality Visit Team who visited us in April. Lewis Creekmore, Program Counsel and the other team members, conducted the visit in a courteous and professional manner that engaged our board, staff, members of the judiciary, clients and community partners in a thoughtful discussion of LABG's strengths as well as areas of potential growth. We recognize that a program assessment by direct engagement in the field requires a tremendous amount of preparation and time away from other responsibilities before, during and after the visit. Please extend our appreciation and compliments to Mr. Creekmore for leading and planning this effort.

We are in receipt of the written report from the Program Quality Visit and we are pleased with the thoughtful and thorough assessment provided by the team. LABG invests considerable resources, time and energy in providing high quality legal representation to our clients. To have LSC confirm that our investment has produced significant positive results for our clients and our communities is a compliment to the dedication and advocacy of our staff as well as the planning and leadership of our board.

LABG's leadership recognizes that despite our many achievements and accomplishments there are always opportunities to enhance and develop our performance. All of the recommendations discussed with the team in the report are areas that have previously been identified by LABG's leadership team during our months of transition and strategic planning. In other words, there were no surprises. LABG's leadership team will incorporate the recommendations into our annual planning and evaluative processes. Many of the recommendations have already been acted upon prior to receipt of the report and we are comforted in knowing that there were no hidden issues that will need to be addressed.

However, LABG leadership would like to provide additional information and comments on a few findings identified in the report:

Comment #1:

LABG appears to be somewhat funding driven in its approach to making adjustments to meet emerging needs. For example they have funding to work with families facing foreclosure and through one of their community partners they have funding to assist seniors, so they respond to the needs that the seniors present, such as Medicare and consumer issues. They have, however, begun reaching out to veterans in recent years with a varied approach that is not so much funding driven as it is need drive," (page 8 paragraph 2).

LABG is committed to providing quality legal representation to all areas identified in the priority setting process. LABG aggressively seeks funding to support and expand legal representation within its priority areas however; LABG does not chase money for the sole reason of acquiring new funds. For example, when LABG recognized foreclosures were a serious problem in its service area, we actively sought funds with which to provide foreclosure assistance. LABG seeks our funding sources as a means to strengthen our program ability to provide legal representation to address



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the needs of low income individuals and families. LABG does not seek funding to provide legal representation for areas outside of our priorities.

Comment #2:

“Community organizations do not participate in the priority setting activities beyond their participation in the needs assessment, nor does LABG seek their input,” (page 8 paragraph 3).

LABG has a robust and active relationship with community partners. Advocates from LABG are actively involved in the community serving on boards of directors for many non-profit organizations, participating in community groups and volunteering for countless community efforts. For example, one attorney is chair of the local community homeless prevention organization and another is the chair of the local domestic violence shelter; another is a member of the local community action commission; another is a member of the Kentucky Bar Association’s Committee on Child Protection and Domestic Violence, while yet another is on the area senior services board and another on the local school board just to name a few. In addition to LABG staff, LABG client board members are nominated and appointed by community organizations with which we partner. While, LABG does not have a formal process for yearly participation in priority setting activities, input from our community partners is sought on a regular and routine basis that assists LABG in determining priorities.

Comment #3:

However, to an outsider the intake procedure appears to be secondary to direct representation despite the stated principle that intake is not a “second rate job.” LABG needs to emphasize the primary role that intake plays in client (and staff) experience and elevate the importance of intake in the office work flow in order to fully integrate it into service delivery, (page 11 Finding #4).

Attorneys in the intake unit are included in all legal work planning; they participate in the weekly intake review meetings. All staff working in intake are encouraged to participate, and do participate, in the statewide substantive law task forces. They are offered the same training opportunities as other advocates. Attorneys in intake are encouraged to handle some short-term court cases. Intake is often credited with being the first to identify emerging issues and to alert case handlers so that adjustments can be made in case assignments. Likewise, if case handlers learn through other community partners of a new and pressing legal need, Intake is alerted and will screen for the issue. The intake manager is a part of the management team.

LABG will give serious consideration to all of the recommendations of the team and will continue to work to improve our performance in all areas. As with many recommendations, where there are fiscal implications we may have to delay implementation until funding is secure (or at least determined by Congress). Nonetheless, these recommendations will serve as a valuable point of reference as we seek to implement our mission of providing high quality and impactful legal assistance to all in our communities.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joshua B. Crabtree".

Joshua B. Crabtree
Executive Director