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ATTORNEY GENERAL LORETTA E. LYNCH AND DOMESTIC POLICY COUNCIL DIRECTOR CECILIA MUÑOZ CONVENE INAUGURAL WHITE HOUSE LEGAL AID INTERAGENCY ROUNDTABLE

March 3, 2016

“The consequences of limited access to justice reverberate far beyond the courtroom. It hampers our ability to do critical work: to prevent domestic violence and human trafficking; to combat homelessness and predatory lending; to help those in need secure health care and other vital government benefits; to keep kids in school; and to help those with criminal records gain a second chance to succeed.” – Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch

This week, Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch and Domestic Policy Council (DPC) Director Cecilia Muñoz co-chaired the inaugural meeting of the **White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable (WH-LAIR)**. Civil legal aid is free legal assistance to low- and moderate-income people who have civil legal problems. These problems are non-criminal; rather, civil legal aid helps people access basic necessities such as health care, housing, government benefits, employment and educational services. The WH-LAIR is comprised of 21 federal agencies and works across the various agencies and offices



to improve federal programs by increasing meaningful access to justice. The roundtable met at the Department of Justice for the first time this week to set an agenda for the next two years, and to discuss how legal aid can enhance agency program objectives, improve outcomes and expand opportunities for the people most in need.

LAIR originally launched in 2012 with 18 agencies, co-chaired by the Department of Justice and DPC, in recognition of the fact that many federal programs and policies that help low-income and other vulnerable populations are more effective when they include civil legal aid. LAIR's achievements prompted President Obama to sign a [Presidential Memorandum formally establishing the WH-LAIR](#) to accelerate its activities, expand to 21 federal partners and demonstrate to the rest of the world that we take access to justice seriously. On Sept. 24, 2015, U.N.

Ambassador [Samantha Power announced](#) the Presidential Memorandum, which also directs WH-LAIR to assist the United States with the implementation of Goal 16 of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. [Ambassador Power again discussed the efforts of WH-LAIR](#) and the universality of Goal 16 at a U.N. side-event on legal aid last week.

Civil legal aid provides a range of services from direct legal representation, to advice and counseling, community education and self-help and technology tools that can help the poor and other underserved and vulnerable populations understand their legal options and obtain better outcomes in the justice system. According to a recent study, by age 60, nearly four in five people will experience some kind of economic hardship such as relying on a government program for

the poor or living at least one year in poverty or very close to it. These Americans cannot afford to hire a lawyer even when faced with life-altering events such as the potential loss of a home, health care, a job or an education. Many victims of domestic violence and elder abuse desperately need the courts for protection and yet do not have the financial resources to pay an attorney. Often, they do not even know that the problems they face have a legal solution, and if they do, they, like an estimated 70 percent of litigants today, are forced to represent themselves when they come to court. In short, civil legal aid can transform lives for the better and the WH-LAIR is committed to helping provide access to these critical services.

WH-LAIR also used the convening of 21 federal agencies to discuss and highlight the many ways federal agencies collaborate with legal aid to advance their missions, including a new partnership between the Departments of Labor and Justice to launch the [National Clean Slate Clearinghouse](#) to develop tools and provide technical assistance on how to expand reentry legal services; the [FTC's Legal Services Collaboration](#); and the WH-LAIR Working Group on Self-Represented Parties in Administrative Hearings, co-chaired by the [Administrative Conference of the United States](#).

In addition to the inaugural meeting, the WH-LAIR launched a [new website](#), a [Report from the LAIR Research Workshop](#) on legal aid and published 4 new [case studies](#) about how civil legal aid [strengthens families](#), [assists law enforcement](#) and helps [human trafficking victims](#) and [Americans with disabilities](#).

More information about WH-LAIR can be found at: www.justice.gov/lair.

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