

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

JANUARY 26, 2012, 4:26 PM ET

Legal Aid Groups Planning Major Layoffs in 2012

The House and Senate didn't agree on much last year, but LBers may recall that in November they did pass a bill that slashed federal funding for civil legal assistance to the poor by about 14% — from \$404.2 million to \$348 million.

That's the [lowest level since 2007](#), according to Legal Services Corp., the group Congress established in 1974 to disburse the money to independent civil legal aid programs across the country.

The result? About what you might expect, and not likely good news for low-income Americans, particularly those in rural areas.

The ongoing wave of layoffs and staff reductions already engulfing civil legal aid programs will likely worsen, says [LSC](#). That's [based on a survey](#), released Thursday, of 132 groups it funds.

Respondents surveyed in December and January said they anticipated laying off 393 employees in 2012, including 163 attorneys. That makes for an expected loss of 1,226 full-time personnel compared with 2010 staffing levels, according to LSC.

Our own Joe Palazzolo [weighed in](#) on this downward trend back in November, when the two house were still mid-haggle over funding:

The proposed cuts come as pro bono hours are down, the number of people eligible for free legal assistance is up, and most of the 136 nonprofit legal aid organizations that rely on LSC grants are cutting lawyers, paralegals and support staff.

Off the Thursday survey, here's a run-down of the differences in staffing between 2010 and what's expected in 2012 as a result of budget cuts:

13.3% cut in attorneys, from 4,351 to 3,769

15.4% cut in paralegals, from 1,614 to 1,364

12.7% cut in support staff, from 3,094 to 2,700

On average, legal aid groups received about 43.6% of their funding from LSC in 2010, but the percentages varied widely from state to state, said Jim Sandman, LSC's president. Funding is drying up at the state level, too, and more Americans are living in poverty than ever before, Sandman said.

"We are experiencing the consequences of a wholesale reduction in so-called discretionary spending, but access to justice is not a discretionary issue in America," he said. "We think funding for legal services should be



correlated to the increase in the size of the poverty population.”

LSC will ask Congress for \$470 million for fiscal 2013, Sandman said.

Copyright 2008 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com