January 2, 2009

Dear Mr. Van Horne:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on potential reauthorization legislation for LSC. While supportive of reauthorization, our comments are limited to a narrow issue: the private money restriction. Alliance for Justice (AFJ) believes organizations should be able to lobby, conduct nonpartisan voter registration or get-out-the-vote drives, or engage in other advocacy efforts with their private funds, even if they receive funding from LSC.

Alliance for Justice is a national association of environmental, civil rights, mental health, women's, children's and consumer advocacy organizations. Since its inception in 1979, AFJ has worked to advance the cause of justice for all Americans, strengthen the public interest community's ability to influence public policy, and foster the next generation of advocates. Through its Nonprofit Advocacy Project and Foundation Advocacy Initiative, AFJ works to strengthen the voice of the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors in important public policy debates by giving tax-exempt organizations a better understanding of the laws that govern their participation in the policy process. The advocacy information and training Alliance for Justice provides to the nonprofit sector encourages greater civic participation in our democratic system of government by groups speaking on behalf of underrepresented communities.

Alliance for Justice believes the funding restriction on private funds for LSC grantees should be lifted because it:

- Represents a fundamental challenge to the rights and independence of the philanthropic and nonprofit community. It interferes with choices of state, local and private charitable donors about how to spend their money.
- Is unnecessary—since 1984, federal grant rules have prohibited federal grantees from using federal funds, either directly or indirectly, for a variety of advocacy related activities and costs.
- Sets a dangerous precedent that, if expanded, would limit the use of private funding for a wide variety of other federal grantees.
- Threatens the viability of important public-private partnerships. Government cannot rely on governmental funding as a proxy to control how nonprofits spend their money in public-private partnerships.
- Treats LSC grantees to a higher standard than other federal grantees.

In addition to participating in the litigation over the LSC onerous restrictions as an amici, we have joined the Brennan Center, AFL-CIO, ACLU, the Center for Law and Social Policy lobbying for removal of the funding restriction. Attached is a one-page fact sheet we distributed as part of those lobbying visits.

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Abby Levine
Deputy Director for Advocacy Programs