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March 20, 2019

The Honorable Shirley N. Weber
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 5
State Capitol, Room 3123
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: March 25, 2019 Hearing – SUPPORT Increase to Equal Access Fund

Dear Assemblymember Weber,

On behalf of the California Women's Law Center (CWLC), we write in support of increasing the Equal Access Fund (EAF) in the Judicial Branch Budget. We join the Legal Aid Association of California in support of Assemblymember Stone's request urging that the EAF be increased by \$20 million (to a total of \$40 million). This funding supports the provision of civil legal services for low-income and indigent Californians, people with disabilities, veterans and seniors who would otherwise be unable to obtain legal assistance.

CWLC's mission is to break down barriers and advance the potential of women and girls through transformative litigation, policy advocacy and education. For 30 years, CWLC has been fighting against gender discrimination and violence, and has been a champion for women's health and economic justice for all. CWLC cannot provide these services without sufficient funding. The EAF is an invaluable foundation of support for California's legal aid system.

The Equal Access Fund was established in 1999 at \$10 million. After remaining stagnant for nearly two decades in the face of expanding need, it received an increase of \$10 million in the 2018 budget. This increase made a great impact on CWLC's ability to expand our services and legal assistance for women and girls in our state.

Currently, there are nearly 8,000 eligible Californians for every one legal aid attorney. Unfortunately, California falls far behind other states in its support of legal services. Our state ranks 18th among states that provide funding for legal aid, providing only a fraction of what states like New York, Massachusetts and Texas provide.

Without more funding, legal aid organizations are limited in what we are able to accomplish. With more funding, CWLC could make an even larger impact in our state. For these reasons, the California Women's Law Center urges you to increase the Equal Access Fund to \$40 million.

Sincerely,



Betsy Butler
Executive Director