Advocates Praise Senators for Bold Student Loan Principles

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 19, 2020

National Consumer Law Center Contact: Jan Kruse at jkruse@nclc.org

Boston – Today, U.S. Senators Schumer, Murray, Brown, and Warren introduced a proposal outlining their plan to protect the financial interests of millions of student loan borrowers during the COVID-19 pandemic by cancelling borrowers’ student loan payments and protecting defaulted borrowers from the government’s draconian collection powers.

The proposal would:

- Immediately cancel monthly student loan payments and authorize the U.S. Department of Education to make payments on behalf of federal student loan borrowers.

- Stop all garnishment of wages, tax refunds, and Social Security benefits.

- Stop all interest capitalization (including from interest accrued prior to President Trump’s March 13th announcement).

- Codify the President’s waiver of interest on federal student loans held by the Department, and extend this waiver to Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) loans.

- Ensure that each federal student loan borrower receives a minimum of $10,000 in student loan relief over the course of the national emergency.

Statement by Persis Yu, director of the National Consumer Law Center’s Student Loan Borrower Assistance Project:

“We applaud Senators Schumer, Murray, Brown, and Warren for keeping at the forefront the needs of those student loan borrowers hit hardest by this current crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is wreaking financial havoc on millions of student loan borrowers, and low-income borrowers and borrowers of color are getting hit the hardest.

“While social distancing and self-quarantine measures are critical for slowing the spread of the virus, they pose a great hardship for many people who need to work to cover their basic necessities. Lost income and insufficient paid leave will hurt people who work in the gig economy, are hourly workers, experience layoffs, or have childcare crises and coverage concerns (especially as schools and daycares close). Borrowers should not need to worry about their student loan payments at a time when they should be focused on the health and safety of their families and communities.

“As the situation worsens, we also need to ensure that low-income and vulnerable populations are protected as much as possible from the economic fall out. Distressingly, even in this public health crisis, the government is continuing to seize wages, Social Security benefits, and tax refunds from...
the most vulnerable borrowers. Without these protections, any other relief provided by the
government during the crisis could also be seized to pay a defaulted student loan. The bold
measures proposed by Senators Schumer, Murray, Brown, and Warren are necessary to shield
borrowers from the government’s draconian collection powers and to ensure that Americans
devastated by the financial crisis are able to dig out from this crisis in the months ahead. Congress
should take immediate action and cancel all student loan payments now.”

NCLC Resources

- Blog: Repaying Student Loans Amid COVID-19 Outbreak, March 12, 2020

- Brief: Congress Must Provide Relief to Defaulted Student Loan Borrowers; Recommendations
  for Higher Education Act Reauthorization, March 2020

- Report: Voices of Despair: Student Borrowers Trapped in Poverty When Government Seizes

- Report: Pushed into Poverty: How Student Loan Collections Threaten the Financial Security of
  Older Americans and Press Release (2017)

Advocates Applaud Halt to Foreclosures and
Bills to Stabilize Homeownership and Protect
Credit Reports but Highlight Need for
Further Relief During Pandemic

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 19, 2020
National Consumer Law Center contact: Jan Kruse (jkruse@nclc.org)

Boston – National Consumer Law Center advocates praised recent measures taken by the federal
government to help homeowners remain in their homes and to protect their credit scores but said
more needs to be done. The foreclosure relief announced yesterday in response to the COVID-19
pandemic by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Federal Housing Finance
Administration (FHFA), which oversees Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, will apply to the majority of
single family mortgages in the nation and impose a 60-day halt on foreclosures and post-foreclosure
evictions.

“We welcome these important first steps toward preventing homeowners from losing their homes
during this pandemic, however the agencies should ensure that their policies provide accessible and
fair procedures for payment relief,” said National Consumer Law Center attorney Alys Cohen.
“States also have a role and should also halt foreclosures and evictions. And the private-label
mortgage market should follow with a moratorium and also ensure that homeowners are offered affordable payment options in the aftermath of the pandemic. Throughout this process, mortgage companies need to ensure access for homeowners whose primary language is not English.

Homeowners can check whether their loan is backed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac by using the agencies’ loan look up tools and can confirm whether their loan is FHA-insured by reviewing their loan documents and mortgage statements. Homeowners should also contact their mortgage company to explore their options.

National Consumer Law Center advocates also applaud new bills in the Senate to further reduce the harm caused by the pandemic. New legislation introduced yesterday by Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio (S. 3509) provides homeowners a six-month foreclosure moratorium while also allowing homeowners to obtain a payment halt and affordable options to subsequently bring their loans current. Additionally, Senator Brown and Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii cosponsored a bill that was introduced on March 17 to protect the credit reports of Americans during the financial crisis.

“By recognizing the need to stop negative credit reporting for at least four months and by providing further relief to consumers experiencing hardship, The Disaster Protection For Workers’ Credit Act (S. 3508) is critical to protecting the millions of consumers who are facing increasing job losses and other economic perils from this pandemic. This bill prevents the financial catastrophe families are or will soon experience from ruining their credit records and their ability to financially recover once the crisis is over,” said National Consumer Law Center attorney Chi Chi Wu.

Free Covid-19 Resources

NCLC has created a new webpage dedicated to Covid-19 and Consumer Protections. The page is continually updated to help families to navigate their finances during these turbulent times and for advocates to keep track of the latest consumer protection policy measures and pending legislation. As part of NCLC’s effort to assist consumers and advocates, we have made the digital edition of Surviving Debt: Expert Advice For Getting Out of Financial Trouble free to all during this unprecedented crisis. Access Surviving Debt for free here. The print version is also available to purchase with bulk discounts at NCLC’s Digital Library bookstore.


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 13, 2020
National Consumer Law Center contact: Jan Kruse (jkruse@nclc.org)
Boston – As concerns continue to grow about the spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19), policymakers must act to protect those who are most economically vulnerable and to empower them with the financial safety net needed to follow public health precautions. One area where the federal government should act is in ensuring that the federal student loan system does not exacerbate the disaster.
As people become sick, and as the effects of the virus ripple through the economy, the coronavirus is going to make it harder for many student loan borrowers to pay their student loans. Public health experts are calling for people to stay home, practice social distancing, and self-quarantine. While this advice may be necessary in this public health crisis, it poses a great hardship for many people who need to work to cover their basic necessities.

READ NCLC’s full STUDENT LOAN BORROWER ASSISTANCE blog post:

Sign up for NCLC’s Student Loans blog: https://nclc.salsalabs.org/elegantsignupform/index.html

Advocates Applaud Senate Vote to Restore Rule to Protect Borrowers from School Fraud and Closures

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 11, 2020

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Boston – Today, National Consumer Law Center advocates applauded the U.S. Senate’s bipartisan use of the Congressional Review Act to block the 2019 Borrower Defense to Repayment rule from going into effect and to preserve the existing rules protecting borrowers from school fraud and closures. The vote was 53 - 42. “We are cheered to see that a bipartisan group of Senators joined the House in standing up for students and protecting access to student loan relief for students harmed by school fraud and closures,” said National Consumer Law Center attorney Abby Shafroth. “Barring a presidential veto, this vote for students means that students will be far more likely to get much needed loan relief if their school closes before they can graduate or lied to them to get them to enroll and take out loans for a program that left them worse off.”

In voting to block the 2019 Borrower Defense to Repayment, the Senate joined the U.S. House, which voted to block the rule in January. These votes were supported by broad coalitions of organizations representing veterans (who are disproportionately targeted by predatory schools for their GI Bill dollars), students, low-income consumers, and advocates for education. For example, last December, a broad coalition of 57 organizations sent a letter to original sponsors Representative Susie Lee and Senator Dick Durbin, supporting their use of the CRA to keep the new rule from becoming law, noting that if it goes into effect the rule would provide relief to only about 3% of student borrowers who were victims of fraud and other illegal school conduct, and that only 1% of schools that defrauded students would have to reimburse taxpayers. The rule would therefore green light school misconduct while making relief for defrauded borrowers all but impossible.

This vote indicates there is bipartisan support for ensuring real access to student loan relief for
students harmed by predatory school conduct and abrupt closures. Access to relief is urgently needed: there are currently more than 200,000 pending applications for relief, and many borrowers have been in limbo for years. “This vote demonstrates Congressional support for providing real relief to student loan borrowers who were scammed and left with heavy debt and worthless degrees—or no degrees at all—by predatory schools,” said Shafroth.

The Congressional Review Act gives Congress the authority to overturn rules promulgated by federal agencies. A CRA resolution of disapproval must be passed by both the House and the Senate and signed by the President in order to overturn a rule. “We urge President Trump to join the bipartisan group of Senators and Representatives in standing up for student borrowers by promptly enacting this reform,” said Shafroth.

New CFPB Advisory Opinion Program Would Give Lenders a Safe Harbor for Violating Federal Consumer Laws

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MARCH 6, 2020

Contacts: National Consumer Law Center: Jan Kruse (jkruse@nclc.org)

Americans for Financial Reform Education Fund: Carter Dougherty (carter@ourfinancialsecurity.org)

Washington, D.C. – The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) today announced plans to create an advisory opinion program which, if enacted, would circumvent the public notice-and-comment process, a pillar of our government and democracy. The intent of the advisory opinion program, according to the CFPB, would be to provide clear guidance to assist companies in better understanding their legal and regulatory obligations through advisory opinions. But in actuality, the CFPB is proposing to sidestep the usual public notice-and-comment rulemaking process under the Administrative Procedures Act, and the congressionally-mandated process for providing interpretations of the Truth and Lending Act.

“This is a dangerous precedent. The CFPB is giving lenders an end-run around the public notice-and-comment process, which is designed to ensure accountability and true transparency. Instead, the CFPB is offering lenders immunity from liability for violations of the law,” said National Consumer Law Center Associate Director Lauren Saunders. “And without explaining the procedures or safeguards, the CFPB is giving yet another ‘get out of jail’ card to industry which is itching to evade compliance with federal law.”

“There is a high risk that issuing interpretive rules this way will result in one-sided or incomplete interpretations, as the Bureau will be dependent on the requester to provide the factual context and will not have the benefit of opposing viewpoints, as is afforded by the public notice-and-comment process under the Administrative Procedures Act,” Saunders added.

Worse, once these interpretations are issued, they could be entitled to a level of deference almost
equal to that of regular rulemaking, outside of the context of the original requester. Agencies that issue advisory opinions usually end up with a welter of contradictory, mostly pro-industry interpretations that have the long-term impact of undermining the credibility of the agency and the deference accorded to it.

“Today’s announcement is yet another example of the CFPB doing favors for industry rather than carrying out its mission to protect consumers. The CFPB’s new advisory opinion program does not prevent consumer harm or even promote transparency and accountability. Instead, it will reduce consumer protection by promoting inconsistent and arbitrary interpretations of consumer law,” said Linda Jun, senior policy counsel at Americans for Financial Reform Education Fund.

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### Telecom Carrier and Consumer Groups Stress Critical Need to Maintain Landmark Consumer Privacy Law to Protect Integrity of Communications System and Curb Robocalls in U.S. Supreme Court Case

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** March 3, 2020

**CONTACTS:**
- National Consumer Law Center: Jan Kruse (jkruse@nclc.org) or (617) 542-8010
- Verizon: Richard Young (richard.j.young@verizon.com)
- Consumer Federation of America: Susan Grant (sgrant@consumerfed.org)

Washington, D.C. – The National Consumer Law Center, the Consumer Federation of America and Verizon filed a joint amicus brief in *Barr v American Association of Political Consultants*, a case before the U.S. Supreme Court in which a group of robocallers is challenging the constitutionality of a provision of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA), which plays an integral role in protecting the country’s communications customers as well as the communications system from being deluged by automated, unsolicited calls to mobile phones. This represents a compelling interest sufficient to justify any narrow restrictions on speech inherent in protecting consumers and the communications network from such calls.

“We wrote this brief with Verizon to emphasize to the Court how the federal Telephone Consumer Protection Act is absolutely essential to limiting unwanted robocalls to our cell phones,” said Margot Saunders, senior counsel to the National Consumer Law Center. “Without the TCPA, robocallers would be unleashed, and families, businesses, and public safety would be at risk.”

“In contrast to legitimate calls made by companies to their customers, the TCPA prohibition on robocalls to cellular subscribers without consent constitutes a critical protective measure that, if removed, would risk exponentially increasing the already large number of unwanted robocalls and rendering legitimate calls ineffective. Telephone users in the United States...
receive billions of autodialed calls monthly, including both calls that are in compliance with the TCPA, and calls that violate it. Many of the callers who make the calls do not just flout the TCPA but also hide from detection by changing the “calling party number” transmitted with their calls so that the calls appear to be coming from someone else. These autodialed calls often go beyond nuisance marketing to furthering dangerous scams such as impersonating personnel from the Internal Revenue Service or the Social Security Administration, thus imperiling the financial well-being of hundreds of millions of recipients. In addition to being a major consumer protection problem, the flood of illegal robocalls harms legitimate companies that use autodialers for calls their customers affirmatively want to receive, but that increasingly find that their contact rates are falling because of consumers’ wavering trust in incoming voice calls.

“In other words, absent the consent requirement for calls to cellular telephones, cellular customer would have no protections from any robocalls except for those few telemarketing calls that violate the do-not-call lists. As is the case with residential customers today, the TCPA would place no limit on numerous categories of calls that—while wanted if consented to—many consumers consider to be intrusive absent consent, such as: charitable calls; informational calls; telephone survey calls; political calls; and phishing calls that do not seek to sell anything, but seek only to further the collection of identity-stealing information from the called parties.

“The average Verizon wireline residential customer receives more than twice the number of spam robocalls than the average wireless customer,” according to Chris Oatway, Verizon associate general counsel for consumer matters. “That’s because wireless customers enjoy greater protections under the TCPA. Eliminating those heightened protections for wireless customers would undercut our efforts to protect our customers from robocalls, which is why Verizon appreciates the opportunity to partner with the consumer protection community on this issue. We thank the National Consumer Law Center for its continued leadership in the fight against robocalls.”

“But the steady drumbeat of unwanted automated calls to cell phones, and the rising—and sometimes dangerous—nature of the scams made through these calls, the nation’s telephone system has already suffered a loss of trust. The TCPA’s prohibition against making automated calls to cell phones is an essential tool to combat unwanted robocalls that would threaten to overwhelm American consumers and the nation’s telephone system if the limits imposed on these calls by the TCPA were removed.

“...although Amici do not, in this brief, take any position on the TCPA exemption at issue in this case, the fact that the TCPA does not prohibit every single non-consented, non-emergency call to cellular phones, and also allows the FCC to promulgate certain limited exemptions, does not on its own undermine this compelling interest. Not only are these exceptions limited to narrow circumstances, but there is no evidence that they have contributed materially to the explosion of robocalls or undermined the TCPA’s purpose. These minimal exceptions to the TCPA’s general protections do not in any way justify a ruling from this Court that would undermine Congress’ ability to adopt the TCPA’s general prohibition on non-consented-to calls to cellular phones.”

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**West Virginia to Adopt Used Car Donor Tax**
Credit Program, Incentivizing Donation of Reliable and Affordable Vehicles

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 2, 2020

Good News Mountaineer Garage contact: Ron Wiles (goodnews.ron@gmail.com) or (304) 680-7140; National Consumer Law Center contacts: Margot Saunders (msaunders@nclc.org), Stephen Rouzer (srouzer@nclc.org) or (202) 595-7847

This afternoon, the West Virginia state senate unanimously approved HB 4969, Creating a Used Car Donor Tax Credit Program to incentivize the donation and reduced-price sale of safe and reliable used vehicles to a program that provides low-cost financing for low-income West Virginia workers. The legislation was first introduced by Delegate Terri Sypolt (R- Preston) and Senator David Sypolt (R-District 14) and will now head to Governor Jim Justice, who is expected to sign the bill.

“Not having a car is a major barrier to employment, with at least two-thirds of the carless households in West Virginia also facing joblessness,” said Delegate Terri Sypolt. “With labor force participation decreasing year after year, it’s essential that the state provide solutions that will boost our state economy and put low-income West Virginians in the driver’s seat.”

The newly-approved legislation supports a comprehensive program being developed by Good News Mountaineer Garage and the National Consumer Law Center that will:

- Provide low interest rate financing for approved cars to eligible workers in the state;
- Subsidize both the interest rate charged for the financing and the cost of the cars;
- Train participants in critical financial literacy and car ownership skills.

The bill will substantially boost the success of this program by making reliable cars more affordable for participating workers. By providing a tax credit up to half of the car’s fair market value (up to $2,000), the bill will encourage individuals to donate used vehicles of higher value to the program and incentivize auto dealers to reduce the purchase price of cars sold through the program. Only cars that are certified by the program to be in reliable and safe condition will trigger the tax credit for their owners. Thus a dealer could sell a $7,000 car for $3,000 (reducing the car price by $4,000), and receive a tax credit for $2,000.

“Low-income workers in West Virginia face significant difficulties finding reliable cars with reasonable financing terms. Without a clean credit history, low-income consumers face higher priced cars and higher interest rates,” said Ron Wiles, deputy director of the Good News Mountaineer Garage. “This bill will help put reliable car ownership in reach for many West Virginia workers.”

Labor force participation has declined in West Virginia over the last several years and car ownership is strongly correlated to employment: at least two-thirds of all carless households in the state have no employed people. Public transit does not fill the void, only reaching 33 of the state’s 55 counties and rarely reaching rural areas. This leaves carless households without meaningful transportation to
get to work or medical appointments, to do basic shopping, and to participate in their community.

The state of West Virginia has a strong interest in helping workers access employment opportunities. The program will assist 150 workers each year. After five years, the program will have enabled 750 West Virginians to get to work, generating more than $13.5 million in wages for these workers along with increased tax revenues for the state.

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The non-profit Good News Mountaineer Garage began in 1999 when a group got together to plan a project to help their fellow West Virginians get on the road to independence. The program has since helped over 3,209 West Virginia families meet their transportation needs.

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**CFPB Fails to Protect Consumers from Abusive Collection of Time-Barred Debts (Again)**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** February 24, 2020

National Consumer Law Center contact: Jan Kruse (jkruse@nclc.org) or (617) 542-8010

Americans for Financial Reform Education Fund contact: Carter Dougherty (carter@ourfinancialsecurity.org) or (202) 251-6700

Washington, D.C. – The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) released a proposed debt collection rule late last Friday to supplement the proposed debt collection rule it released in May.

The supplemental rule states that debt collectors must provide consumers with specific disclosures when collecting debt that is beyond the statute of limitations (time-barred debt).

“Unfortunately, disclosures cannot adequately protect vulnerable consumers from abusive practices related to the collection of time-barred debt” said April Kuehnhoff, an attorney at the National Consumer Law Center who focuses on debt collection. “Consumers pressured to pay old debts will not understand why they are being contacted if the debt is too old to sue on, or how a $25 payment might restart the statute of limitations on the debt.”

“To truly protect consumers,” said Linda Jun, senior policy counsel at Americans for Financial Reform Education Fund, “the CFPB should ban collection of time-barred debt in and out of court because these debts are so old that records are lost, the collector may have the wrong person or wrong amount, and the debt cannot be collected without mistakes or deception.”

The proposed disclosures would be in addition to the CFPB’s proposal announced in May to prohibit collectors from filing or threatening a lawsuit on a time-barred debt, but only if the collector “knows or should know” that the legal time limit to sue has expired. “The CFPB took what should have been a simple prohibition and watered it down,” said Kuehnhoff.
The public will have 60 days to submit comments on the proposed rule after it is published in the Federal Register.

Related Resources about the May 2019 Proposed Debt Collection Rule

- **Summary:** [CFPB Debt Collection Rule Must Protect Consumers, Not Abusive Collectors](https://www.nclc.org/issues/debt-collection-rulemaking-at-the-cfpb.html), May 2019
- **Press Release:** [Consumer Watchdog’s Proposed Debt Collection Rule Bites Consumers: Authorizes Harassment by Debt Collectors](https://www.nclc.org/issues/debt-collection-rulemaking-at-the-cfpb.html), May 7, 2019
- **Coalition (234 national, state, and local groups) comments to the CFPB re: proposed debt collection rule**, Sept. 18, 2019
- **Group long comments to the CFPB re: proposed debt collection rule**, Sept. 18, 2019

For more information on NCLC’s extensive body of work on fair debt collection, see https://www.nclc.org/issues/debt-collection.html and CFPB debt collection rulemaking: https://www.nclc.org/issues/debt-collection-rulemaking-at-the-cfpb.html

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**Defrauded Borrowers Sue U.S. Department of Education Contractor for Seizing Funds While They Wait in Limbo for Borrower Defense Relief**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 12, 2020

National Consumer Law Center contact: Jan Kruse ([jkruse@nclc.org](mailto:jkruse@nclc.org)) or (617) 542-8010

*Download the complaint*

Boston- The National Consumer Law Center, Justice Catalyst Law, and Flitter Milz, P.C. today served Maximus Federal Services, Inc. (Maximus) with a class action lawsuit, alleging that the company is engaging in illegal collection activity against thousands of federal student loan borrowers who submitted Borrower Defense to repayment claims to the U.S. Department of Education (Department).

Plaintiff Jaimaria Bodor borrowed federal student loans to attend a program run by the now defunct for-profit Corinthian Colleges, Inc. (Corinthian). Like many other Corinthian students, Bodor incurred debt to attend a program that wasted her time and provided no value. Because she alleges that Corinthian misled her about the value of its program, she filed a Borrower Defense application with the Department to have her loans canceled. Defendant Maximus unlawfully continued to process wage garnishments, tax refund offsets, and Social Security offsets against Bodor and other members of the prospective class, when Maximus was supposed to cease all collection activity during the pendency of the Borrower Defense applications.
“The ability to seize wages and tax refunds is an extraordinary collection power that causes borrowers terrible harm,” said Persis Yu, director of the National Consumer Law Center’s Student Loan Borrower Assistance Project. “Using this power against borrowers who were misled by their schools adds insult to injury and is inexcusable.”

Defendant Maximus, based in Virginia, has a contract with the Department to service defaulted federal student loans, and is the largest student loan servicer in the federal student loan system, handling nearly 8 million (7.98M) student loan borrowers’ accounts. The Department is expected to pay Maximus over $848 million for this contract. Borrowers who submit Borrower Defense applications can choose to stop collections on their loans. Contrary to the explicit instructions of the Department, Maximus subjected Bodor, and the class that she seeks to represent, to continuing involuntary collection activity.

“Maximus is the sole contractor handling the Department of Education’s default loan system,” said Brian Shearer, legal director of Justice Catalyst Law. “If Maximus is allowed to ignore the rules established by Congress and Department, it’s as if the rules don’t even exist.”

**Background:** On December 20, 2017, Calvillo Manriquez v. DeVos, was filed by the Project on Predatory Student Lending at the Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School and Housing & Economic Rights Advocates in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California seeking full Borrower Defense relief for all students who had attended certain Corinthian schools during a designated time period. On May 25, 2018, the Court in Calvillo Manriquez ordered Secretary Betsy DeVos to cease all efforts to collect debts from borrowers who would fit the criteria of the putative class.

According to the Department’s filings in that case, thousands of borrowers who had applied for Borrower Defense relief—including, but also beyond those protected by the May 25, 2018 Court Order—continued to experience involuntary collection efforts because the Department’s contractors, such as Maximus, placed their loans in an incorrect repayment status.

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**Cruel Cuts for Struggling Families in the President’s Proposed FY21 Budget**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 10, 2020**

**National Consumer Law Center contact:** Jan Kruse (jkruse@nclc.org) or (617) 542-8010

*Trump again calls for elimination of Legal Services Corp and home energy assistance; supports drastic cuts and changes to weaken the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau*

Washington – President Trump’s [proposed budget](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2021-budget/) once again seeks to eliminate funding for programs that have bipartisan support and help rural households, elders, struggling families and veterans, according to advocates at the National Consumer Law Center. Additionally, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau would be severely weakened due to drastic cuts and changes to weaken its independence.
“Legal services programs serving urban and rural areas in every state around the country are there for veterans, seniors and struggling families when they need legal help to transition from military service, to save their homes from foreclosure, to protect the Social Security funds they need to buy food, or to stop domestic violence.” said Richard DuBois, executive director of the National Consumer Law Center. In the words of the late Justice Antonin Scalia, the Legal Services Program ‘pursues the most fundamental of American ideals, and it pursues equal justice in those areas of life most important to the lives of our citizens,’” he added.

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) has broad bipartisan support, and the proposed elimination of LSC in previous Trump Administration budgets was opposed by the heads of over 150 law firms in all 50 states, 185 leaders of corporate legal departments, the Conference of Chief Justices, and the Conference of State Court Administrators.

“The budget also proposes drastic cuts to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and changes that would weaken its independence from Wall Street lobbyists,” added Lauren Saunders, associate director of the National Consumer Law Center.

The proposed budget, once again, would also eliminate the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the low-income Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) program — three safety net programs that protect the health and safety of low-income families who have trouble paying their energy bills, and provide the core funding for the front-line community groups that deliver these programs in all 50 states.

“The President’s proposed budget for FY 2021 once again would leave poor older consumers, individuals with disabilities, and families with young children out in the cold by zeroing out funding for three critical health and safety programs,” said Olivia Wein, staff attorney with the National Consumer Law Center. “We urge Congress to stand up for struggling households and adequately fund these essential programs. The Administration’s characterization that “LIHEAP is no longer a necessity” does not reflect the experiences of working families.” LIHEAP and WAP are targeted to help vulnerable populations, including the elderly and families with young children, who are at risk from severe health complications, including death, from frigid winters and sweltering summers. LIHEAP provides bill assistance for families so they can afford essential home heating and cooling to stay safe. WAP provides cost-effective long-term measures to make drafty homes weather-tight and lower energy bills year after year. CSBG funds community action agencies that are the front-line service agencies that deliver LIHEAP and WAP assistance.