

**Opening Statement of Congressman Steve Cohen**  
**Forum on the Impact of Sequestration and the Shutdown on**  
**The Provision of Justice**  
**October 8, 2013**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this forum.

Unfortunately, issues of access to justice have rarely been discussed in the Judiciary Committee since you lost your gavel. But as sequestration and this reckless government shutdown continue to take their toll, I appreciate your calling attention to this important issue.

If there's a silver lining to the government shutdown, it's that it reminds us of the important work performed by dedicated public servants every day. As the Department of Justice operates on bare bones and the federal courts prepare to join it in this status, we should recognize how important it is to get this government back to work.

During the shutdown, civil rights laws are going unenforced, fraudulent tax schemes are robbing the Treasury of needed revenue, and immigrants fighting deportation or seeking asylum are waiting indefinitely to resolve their fate. Eventually this shutdown will end and the temporary damage will be restored. But unfortunately the long-term damage due to sequestration will remain.

Sequestration cut the DOJ budget by more than \$1.6 billion, meaning critical programs like COPS and VAWA have less money to distribute. And there are fewer funds available to pursue violent criminals, stop financial crime, and protect civil rights.

The courts are suffering as well and too many Americans will continue to be denied access to justice. For example, Judge Julia Gibbons of the Sixth Circuit, the Chair of the Budget Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States, who also happens to be a proud Memphian, recently testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee. She explained that clerks of court and probation and pretrial services offices are expected to lose up to 1,000 positions this year, with furloughs accounting for an additional 8,600 workdays lost. All the while, they are supervising a record number of offenders and criminal defendants in the community.

Funding for courthouse security has been cut 30%, putting the people who work there at greater risk. Judge Gibbons called a continuing resolution at current levels "devastating for our entire system of justice." She explained that their "workload does not go away because of budget shortfalls. Deep cuts mean that the Judiciary cannot perform adequately its Constitutional and statutory responsibilities."

Judge Gibbons also noted that the Federal Defender offices have been cut by 6% with staff expected to be furloughed an average of 15 days over the last half of the fiscal year. The more we cut public defender services, the more we fail to live up to the promise of *Gideon v. Wainwright*, whose 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary we observed this year.

Meanwhile, federal funding for the Legal Services Corporation, which delivers needed funds to civil legal assistance programs across the country, is far too low to meet the demand. In my community, Memphis Area Legal Services lost 5% of its funding due to sequestration. When you add in state and local funds lost over the last two years, its funding has been reduced by more than \$300,000 and its staff has been reduced from 50 to 38. The attorneys there do heroic work, but these cuts mean they can no longer serve thousands of people in need.

We're talking about victims of domestic violence who need protective orders from abusive partners, homeowners facing foreclosure, and elderly people who've been victimized by shady lenders. When we cut legal assistance programs, we effectively shut the courthouse doors to countless Americans who rely on them to deliver justice.

I'm looking forward to the testimony of our witnesses to hear more about the impact these cuts are having on services throughout the justice system and the DOJ.

I hope that our Republican friends will take note. The shutdown is not a game. Sequestration is not a game. These are real cuts hurting real people and we need to get this government back up and running again at budget levels that will allow it deliver justice once more.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.