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**Subject:** FW: Future of the LLLT Program  
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**From:** Vanessa Shaughnessy [mailto:vkrschaughnessy@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, April 19, 2021 7:14 PM  
**To:** OFFICE RECEPTIONIST, CLERK <SUPREME@COURTS.WA.GOV>  
**Subject:** Future of the LLLT Program

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Dear Honorable Justices,

Please reconsider the decision to sunset the LLLT program. LLLTs have the potential to increase access to justice on a large scale. The program has not yet fulfilled this potential because it hasn't received adequate support or the time necessary to become fully realized.

The primary reason that there are not more licensed LLLTs is that the requirements have been onerous and unpredictable, creating barriers for many who would be competent practitioners. I have navigated this pathway myself, and it has been difficult. I heard about the LLLT program on the radio and enrolled in the core curriculum at the earliest opportunity. Having first heard of the program in 2016, I am just now eligible for licensure. With a more streamlined process there would be more robust numbers of LLLTs, which is crucial to seeing the benefits reach all the people who need them.

I know people who have been hugely helped by practicing family law LLLTs. Each of these LLLT clients lacked the financial resources to hire attorneys while dealing with opposing parties who were abusive. It is a terrible feeling when you have a family law crisis affecting your children, need help, and are unable to get the help you need because of your financial limitations. With much respect to those attorneys who offer reduced rate services, the need is greater than can be met by them.

To meet the legal needs of Washington low-to-moderate income people, renew the family law LLLT pathway, streamlining the requirements without reducing the standards of competence, and expand to the badly needed practice areas of Landlord Tenant and Debt and Finance. Having recent work experience in legal aid in these areas, I know free representation is only available to those in the most extreme financial circumstances—there are so many people who cannot navigate these issues themselves, do not qualify for free legal aid, and could never, in a million years, afford an attorney. These issues impact the stability and wellbeing of whole households. The need is there, and it is big.

In addition to being a LLLT candidate, my family has been in need of this approximate level of legal assistance in the past. I know how much it could have helped us, and I also know that sometimes you really do need an attorney:

1) When I was pregnant with my first child, my husband had not secured a custody arrangement for his then 8-year-old daughter. Our income was not sufficient to care for our family and hire an attorney, although we were not low-income enough for legal aid. He got his documents drafted by a father's rights clinic that, in retrospect, was engaged in UPL. When we tried to explain that the bio-mom was a dangerous addict who was doing her children harm, they laughed and said that a father

would be lucky to get every other weekend if he tried to contest her primary custody. We were able to get the documents filed before the mother moved out of state, and we spent the next several years doing pro se modifications to eventually get primary custody and supervised visitations for the other parent, using only the original paperwork as a reference. This was a dire situation that desperately needed competent legal help, which we did not have access to.

2) When we were buying our home, it came to light that my husband had an unpaid judgement from an old credit card debt that risked losing our financing and our only chance at home ownership. On the recommendation of our real estate agent, we paid a \$2,000 fee for an attorney to negotiate the debt and file a satisfaction of judgment. For this straightforward service, he billed us an additional \$8,000 without notifying us about additional costs, causing financial devastation and almost costing us our home. We would have been well-served by being able to hire a low- or flat-rate legal technician.

3) At the age of 14, my husband's daughter had been living with us full-time for years, and we wanted to do a step-parent adoption. There were no forms online and the facilitator at the court gave me outdated photocopies that were all written up for the opposite gender step-parent. I lovingly crossed out all the "he's" with "she's" on the paperwork, and when we got to court, the judge said: "you really need to get a lawyer." So, we got a lawyer! We paid him \$10,000, because we did need a lawyer, and we were able to pay for one at that time. It was a complicated situation, he was a veteran attorney, and we were grateful to have his representation.

There is a place for all of us. Discontinuing the LLLT license hurts real people—real people who have committed to this path, real people who intended to commit to this path once it expanded, and many, many real people who desperately need the kind of assistance LLLTs would be able to provide. Please reconsider.

Thank you,

Vanessa Shaughnessy

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