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AOC Receives \$1 Million Grant to Expand JusticeCorps

By a MetNews Staff Writer

The Administrative Office of the Courts said yesterday that it has been awarded a new AmeriCorps grant of \$1 million per year for three years to expand its California JusticeCorps Program.

The new funding will allow the AOC to expand its JusticeCorps program in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area and San Diego as well as launch a new JusticeCorps program in the Sacramento area, the AOC said.

U.S. Representative Doris Matsui, D-Sacramento, who serves as co-chair of the National Service Caucus in Congress, wrote a letter of support on behalf of the AOC grant application earlier this year.

“Through the expanded program, JusticeCorps members will assist several thousand self-represented litigants with family, housing, domestic violence, and financial legal matters, such as requesting restraining orders, responding to eviction notices and establishing child support,” she said. “I am so pleased that the \$1 million in federal funding will allow this program to bring its critical work to the Sacramento area and help many of our community’s most vulnerable members.”

According to the California Judicial Council’s Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants, over 4 million people come to court each year in California without an attorney to represent them, typically because they cannot afford one.

The California JusticeCorps program was created to improve the capacity of the judicial system to provide access to justice for all Californians. JusticeCorps is the only AmeriCorps program of its kind that recruits, trains and places undergraduate college students in service to assist members of the public in court-based legal access self-help centers.

With the assistance of JusticeCorps members, self-help centers can provide services aimed not just at resolving legal matters, but also listening to concerns, reducing anxieties and clarifying confusing circumstances. With the new grant funding, starting in the 2010 to 2011 fiscal year, JusticeCorps will place over 300 students in service in court-based legal access self-help centers providing over 100,000 hours of assistance to the public in matters involving eviction, divorce, child custody, domestic violence and small claims.

Since the program began in 2004, JusticeCorps members have assisted 194,600 self-represented litigants in 24 different languages, filed over 130,300 legal documents, and provided over 122,500 referrals to additional services.

The Corporation for National and Community Service announced the

\$1,021,305 grant on June 7. The grant is among the largest of 31 grants totaling approximately \$19.2 million in California. Previously, funding for the JusticeCorps program has come exclusively from state sources.

The JusticeCorps grant is one of first round of grants made under the new bipartisan Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act signed last year which expands and enhances AmeriCorps, a national network of programs that engages more than 70,000 people each year in intensive service to meet critical needs in communities throughout the nation.

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