

**Access for All * Alliance for Justice * American Civil Liberties Union *
American Association for Justice * Center for Biological Diversity * Center for Food Safety
* Center for Law & Social Policy * Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice *
Endangered Species Coalition * Law Foundation of Silicon Valley * Oregon Wild
* People for the American Way * National Consumer Law Center® *
National Senior Citizens Law Center * National Employment Lawyers Association *
National Fair Housing Alliance * National Legal Aid & Defender Association *
National Health Law Program * Natural Resources Defense Council * Oceana *
Public Citizen * Rocky Mountain Wild * Sierra Club *
Western Environmental Law Center**

RE: Opposition to the “Government Litigation Savings Act” (H.R. 1996)

November 16, 2011

Dear Representative,

The “Government Litigation Savings Act” (H.R. 1996) would prohibit those seeking to enforce important rights and interests – such as food safety, highway safety, pollution protection, etc. – from recovering attorney’s fees under the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA). In doing so, this bill would harm all Americans and could serve as a de facto bar to the courthouse door for low income citizens and other parties that do not have access to free legal counsel. **Thus, we ask that you oppose H.R. 1996.**

EAJA, which was signed into law by President Carter and permanently funded by President Reagan, awards costs of litigation and attorney’s fees when a citizen, non-profit organization, or small business wins a case involving the federal government and can show that the federal government’s position was not “substantially justified.” Because this is a difficult legal standard to achieve, even plaintiffs who win their cases cannot always recover legal fees. For three decades veterans, seniors, the disabled, small businesses, and non-profit groups from across the ideological spectrum have relied on EAJA to challenge illegal government actions.

H.R. 1996 would gut EAJA and make the federal government less accountable by hindering the public’s ability to challenge government abuses. When the government acts illegally, individuals and organizations should be able to enforce the law to protect the public without paying for representation from their own pockets. If H.R. 1996 became law, those who would otherwise challenge government abuses to benefit the rest of us would be deterred, leading to more foodborne illness, more dangerous highways, dirtier air and water, etc.

The right to challenge harmful actions by the federal government is as fundamental to our democracy as our right to vote and freedom of speech. Indeed, in our system of checks and balances, review by the courts is one of the most important ways to ensure government accountability. H.R. 1996 constitutes a sweeping attack on the ability of citizens from all ends of the political spectrum to prevent government abuse. **Again, we respectfully urge you to oppose this harmful bill.**

Sincerely,

Alan Houseman
Executive Director
Center for Law & Social Policy

Mary Beth Beetham
Director of Legislative Affairs
Defenders of Wildlife

Marty Hayden
Vice President, Policy and Legislation
Earthjustice

John Bowman
Director of Federal Relations
American Association for Justice

Nan Aron
President
Alliance for Justice

Andrew Kimbrell
Executive Director
Center for Food Safety

Steve Pedery
Conservation Director
Oregon Wild

Leda Huta
Executive Director
Endangered Species Coalition

Grant Costello
Executive Director
Western Environmental Law Center

John Buse
Legal Director
Center for Biological Diversity

Athan Manuel
Director, Lands Protection Program
Sierra Club

David Arkush
Director, Congress Watch
Public Citizen

Josh Pollock
Conservation Director
Rocky Mountain Wild

Laura W. Murphy
Director, Washington Legislative Office
American Civil Liberties Union

Felice Pace
Coordinator
Access for All

Scott Schlesinger
Legislative Director
Natural Resources Defense Council

Eric Gutierrez
Legislative and Policy Director
National Employment Lawyers Association

Marge Baker
Executive Vice President for Policy and Program Planning
People for the American Way

Shanna L. Smith
President & CEO
National Fair Housing Alliance

Corry Westbrook
Federal Policy Director
Oceana

Jane Perkins
Legal Director
National Health Law Program

James Zahradka
Supervising Attorney
Law Foundation of Silicon Valley

Don Saunders
Director of Civil Legal Services
National Legal Aid & Defender Association

Lauren K. Saunders
Managing Attorney
National Consumer Law Center® (on behalf of its low income clients)

Gerald A. McIntyre
Directing Attorney
National Senior Citizens Law Center