

Legal Services

Item: In the last six months of 1973, according to White House counsel, the Government spent nearly \$300,000 for lawyers and legal services to prepare President Nixon's Watergate defense.

Item: The bill to create a Federal Legal Services Corporation to provide funds for people too poor to afford a lawyer in civil cases has been vetoed once by Mr. Nixon — and faces tough sledding in Congressional conference next week.

Item: At his last press conference Mr. Nixon remarked that "if the Attorney General of the United States should rule that the President should pay for his defense, I'll find somebody to loan me the money."

Nobody has yet proposed that the President should not be served by the best available counsel, even at Government expense, in order to get his "day in court" and expedite the Watergate case. However, he probably would not qualify for Office of Economic Opportunity legal services assistance as an indigent client.

Even if only ironically, the revelations of costly legal expenses entailed by the President serve to underscore the value of Federal legal services programs for those in need. Despite the dwindling "war on poverty" initiated by President Johnson, 2,300 O.E.O. lawyers in 900 neighborhood offices have a caseload of one million clients a year.

Presumably the White House is for the creation of a Legal Services Corporation, in principle. Certainly it should do nothing to hobble the measure now, in practice. Everybody, from the President to the lowliest citizen in the land, deserves a competent lawyer in case of need — even if he can't afford one.