

Increase Funding for Civil Legal Aid

MLAC seeks \$29 million for FY21

Line Item 0321-1600

FY20 Appropriation: \$24 million | Gov. FY21 Recommendation: \$24 million

What is Civil Legal Aid?

Unlike in criminal cases, **there is no right to an attorney in civil cases**, even though the consequences can be severe.

Civil legal aid organizations provide advice and representation at no cost to low-income people who need help with serious legal issues related to housing, domestic violence, immigration, health care, employment, education discrimination, consumer rights, and more.

Eligibility: people with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty line - which is \$32,750/year for a family of four.

Why is more funding needed?

- **Insufficient funding** forces legal aid organizations to turn away the majority of eligible people who seek help.
- **More complex cases** require more time and revenue. There's an affordable housing crisis in many areas; immigration cases are surging; and more elders live in poverty.
- More funds are needed to **recruit and retain legal aid lawyers** and paralegals.
- **It's a wise investment** that saves the state money on costs related to homeless shelters, health care, and other services.

Legal aid last year:

88,000
people helped

\$69 million
in economic benefits
to the Commonwealth
and residents

94%
of Massachusetts
towns had at least
one resident who
received legal aid

Unfortunately, lack of funding forced legal aid to turn away the majority of people who sought assistance.

“I wouldn’t be here and healthy without legal aid.”

- Bill, who received life-saving medical treatment because Greater Boston Legal Services helped resolve an administrative error hindering his health insurance coverage

“Legal aid really saved our lives.”

- Mindy, a survivor of domestic violence and mother who received legal protections with help from Community Legal Aid

What is MLAC’s role?

MLAC is the largest funding source for civil legal aid in the Commonwealth. It distributes funding to 6 regional and 10 statewide legal aid organizations across Massachusetts.

MLAC also supports legal aid organizations with communications; data and research; recruitment of new lawyers; diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; and information technology.



What is Equal Access to Justice?

Everyone deserves a fair process during civil proceedings, regardless of income. Legal aid helps Massachusetts deliver on the promise of equal justice for all.

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