

THE UNBEATABLE ADVOCATE

Fourth Edition

Spring 2011

Vol. 2, Issue 1

Welcome! This is the fourth edition of the newsletter for client board members of Massachusetts legal aid programs.

This issue focuses on a variety of client perspectives and experiences on a range of issues, including the retirement of two of Massachusetts' most prominent legal aid leaders: Bob Sable and Allan Rodgers.

On the right, you can see what's lined up in this issue for you – updates, profiles and client perspectives from around the state. Enjoy!

In this issue...

Bob Sable Retires

The Secure Communities Program

One of the Gang: Allan Rodgers

Report on the Access to Justice Commission

...and more!

Send in Submissions!

Changing of the Guard at GBLS: Bob Sable Retires

By **ROBBIE ADJEI**

Robert A. Sable, or Bob, as he prefers to be called by his colleagues and clients, will be exiting GBLS this summer as he plans to retire after 20 years as executive director.

Bob has served the poor and disadvantaged for 48 years. His service began in 1963 in the Peace Corps in Liberia. Bob joined the Peace Corps after receiving his undergraduate degree from Harvard College, where he majored in government. He served for two years in the Peace Corps and then attended Yale Law School, where he earned his law degree in 1968.

"When I was in college I was interested in politics and government service," he says. "I thought that law was a good background for both and would give me the ability to move from one place to another. So that's how I became interested in law."

Bob's career as a legal aid attorney was greatly influenced by several legendary legal advocates such as Edward Sparer, who founded The National Center for Law and Economics (formerly known as the Welfare Rights Law Center) during the civil rights era;

Gary Bellow, a legal services lawyer who worked with Cesar Chavez in California on labor rights for migrant workers; and Jean and Edward Cahn, authors of *The War on Poverty: A Civilian Perspective*.

"I was inspired by all of them to believe that lawyers had an important role to play in helping to shape the struggle against poverty," he says. "I came to believe that poverty and race were the two biggest issues facing the U.S."

Bob said that he has learned from his long career as a legal aid attorney "just how complex the struggle against poverty truly is," he says. And when approaching the issue of poverty, you must confront the "internal struggles" of the poor communities you serve as well as the "outside struggles."



Bob Sable has served as executive director at Greater Boston Legal Services since 1991.

Continued on page 2...

Bob Sable Retires

Continued from first page

Bob is well liked by the clients and in the communities that GBLS serves. His interaction with both is said to be highly respectful, and he is very popular for his strong support for client and community participation in the governing of GBLS. His retirement raises the question among clients and community leaders whether his leaving will impact the way clients now participate in the business of GBLS.

“Frankly I don’t understand why there would be any concern about that,” Bob says. “GBLS grew out of the war on poverty, as the legal services programs did with the notion of maximum, feasible participation of the poor. It’s built into our by laws and practices. I can’t imagine any of that changing just because there is going to be a new executive director”.

Bob’s effective and productive leadership as executive director of GBLS has been widely recognized, and he has received numerous awards from the legal community. One, which exemplifies his dedicated service to the endless struggle of providing equal justice to the poor, is the Massachusetts Bar Association’s Legal Services Award. The recipient of the award is chosen by his/her peers for their outstanding contribution to providing legal assistance to the disadvantaged.

Modestly, Bob credits his skills as a productive leader and legal aid attorney to the wisdom and knowledge he acquired from working with various groups of diverse people over his long career.

“I personally think it’s very important that someone has experience working with community groups. You need somebody who on the one hand doesn’t look down at poor people or doesn’t think of them as being radically different, and on the other hand doesn’t romanticize poor people,” he says. “It’s very important that if GBLS is going to remain committed to moving people out of poverty that we also remain committed to representing community groups.”

Bob’s long and inspiring career spans close to half a century and has crossed into almost every spectrum of the law. As a legal aid lawyer, his long resume exhibits work in trial work and legislative advocacy, as well as academic writing and management.

“The one big thing that I wish I had focused more energy on at GBLS is working on assuring the professional development and advancement of younger attorneys, and particularly attorneys of color,” Bob says.

But overall, his years at GBLS have been a great experience for the program and for Bob. “There is hardly an aspect of this job that hasn’t been very satisfying,” he said “It is a real privilege to work at GBLS. It’s a rare opportunity to really make a difference in people’s lives; to work with a bunch of wonderful people and the community has been wonderful. But it’s clearly time for me to leave and the program to get some new leadership. It’s certainly has been a wonderful 20 years with GBLS.”

Something to Share?

Then send it in for the next *Unbeatable Advocate!*

All photos, submissions, comments, and news tips can be sent to:

David Pearson:
dpearson@shawmuteducation.org
617-304-4035 or toll free at 877-625-0282

Mic Cepeda:
my_air2@hotmail.com
617-401-5496

The next *Unbeatable Advocate* will be due out in January 2012. All copy must be in by December 15th.

The Secure Communities Program: How Secure is it for Immigrant Communities?

By **MAGALIS TRONCOSO LAMA**



Magalis Troncoso Lama is a GBLS Board member, the founder and director of the Dominican Development Center. You can send her feedback at 3227 Washington Street-#1, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

The Secure Communities Program, a program by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), depends on police officers providing information on the people they arrest to immigration authorities, who check to see if they're violating immigration laws and might be deportable. Although it claims to make communities safer, the Secure Communities Program actually brings uncertainty into the immigrant community and creates a space for racial profiling.

Immigrant organizations in Boston are struggling to stop the program and protect vulnerable families from deportation. The lack of immigration reform is opening the door to all kinds of abuse and misconceptions about immigrants. We are opposed to this program because it increases insecurity and the lack of trust in the local police. The Secure Program was approved here in Boston as a pilot program, the City was running the program and many of us, including immigrant organizations did not know about the program. Yes, we realized that deportation of immigrant families was impacting families in Chelsea, Revere, Brockton, New Bedford and other Boston areas. Immigrant organizations reacted with anger and sadness.

A few weeks ago, immigrant organizations such as Centro Presente, Alpha, Chelsea Collaborative, Centro Hondureños, among others, rallied at the State House to ask for immigrant justice.

In Remembrance

It is with sadness that we report the passing of Josephine Worthy. A resident of Holyoke, she was one of the first clients to serve on the Legal Services Corporation Board. She always fought for clients' voices to be heard and never lost her sense of community.



GBLS board member Lou Ann David

Client board member Lou Ann David has also recently passed away. Lou Ann was a former client of GBLS. She fought for and obtained tenant ownership of the Clarendon Hills housing project assuring that it would remain affordable. GBLS helped her in this and other housing issues.

Upcoming Events

Race for Justice 5k Walk/Run & 10k Run
Merrimack Valley North Shore Legal Services
June 26, 2011, Lowell, MA

2011 Client Impact Leadership II
Building Healthy Communities: Client Leaders for Justice
July 11-13, 2011, Baltimore, MD

ATJC Sub-Committee on Communications
Postponed until September, Springfield, MA

Also, be on the lookout for Civil Policy Representative to NLADA election ballots towards the end of June. Ask your program director if you don't receive one by mail.

Strategic Planning Update

BY LONNIE POWERS

MLAC's strategic planning process entered its second phase in the summer of 2010 with the formation of an inclusive planning committee to assist the Board Strategic Planning Committee. The Planning Committee included Project Directors, Client Board Members, MLAC Board members and staff. The strategic planning consultant also conducted telephone interviews with several client board members.

The Planning Committee was charged to identify issues within the legal services system. Clients were represented on the Planning Committee by Myrnairis Cepeda (GBLS), Ann Leavenworth (WMLS) and David Pearson (VLP). Three task forces were formed as a result of these discussions – Communications, Leadership Transitions and Delivery Systems. Two additional client representatives were added once the task forces were formed – Betty Criss and Len Spinner. The task forces concluded their work in April by presenting their recommendations to the Planning Committee. The following summarizes recommendations specific to clients:

1. MLAC and the programs it funds should make recruiting client board members a high priority, especially client-eligible persons who are leaders in their community.
2. The MLAC Board should establish efficient ways to meet and get to know the programs, Program Directors, MLAC staff, and client board members.
3. Client Board members on MLAC and program boards should have greater opportunities for meaningful involvement in governance of the legal services system.
4. Diversity at the Board level should be reflected among both attorneys and client members; historically board diversity has consisted of clients of color.

The Board Strategic Planning Committee will prepare a draft Strategic Plan over the summer and early fall. The draft plan will be reviewed by the MLAC Board and all interested stakeholders.

“Day of Justice” Law Workshops

BY DAVID PEARSON

On May 2, the Hampden County Bar Association in cooperation with Western Mass Legal Services (WMLS) and the Massachusetts Justice Project sponsored the 2nd annual “Day Of Justice” with legal workshops for the community at the historic Old First Church in downtown Springfield. The event allowed residents in the community to talk to lawyers and learn about the judicial system. The workshops featured leaders from the legal services community.

In the “Options for Homeowners Facing Foreclosure” workshop, I had the opportunity to talk with Eugene Berman, Chairman of the Hampden County Bar. Berman says, “There is a need to establish judicial review in the foreclosure process.” Massachusetts currently does not have mandatory review by the court in foreclosure matters. Given the socio-economic climate of today more people should listen to him. The workshop was led by Francis K. Morris Esq. of WMLS, Scott W. Day Esq. of Dunn & Phillips P.C. and Robert J. Michael Senior Vice President of the Hampden Bank. Attendees learned the need to seek bankruptcy counsel when there is a deficiency gap in a foreclosure.

Ann Leavenworth and Charlie Casartello of WMLS played key roles in organizing the event. They hope the event will grow in coming years and allow more people to learn about access to justice issues. Many attorneys took the time to talk personally with attendees about specific issues.



Ryan Dorsey and Hisham Leil of WMLS, and Anithia, a non-profit employee, discuss “Options for Immigrants Who are Survivors of Crime and Abuse”

One of the Gang: Allan Rodgers Retires After More Than 40 Years

By DAVID PEARSON

Allan Rodgers started his legal services career in March 1969. Prior to becoming a legal services attorney, Allan spent seven years of practice in a Boston law firm and in the Attorney General's office. At this time, legal services programs were funded through the federal Office of Economic Opportunity, an outgrowth of President Johnson's "Great Society."

It was quite an unstable existence in the early days. The fortunes of legal services programs blew with the political winds until Congress passed the Legal Services Corporation Act in 1974. In the early 1980's, Reagan and Congress cut the Legal Services Corporation's budget by 25 percent, which led Massachusetts to form the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC). MLAC was funded initially by surcharges on court filing fees.

These events also led a group of Massachusetts lawyers to form the "Gang of Eleven," whose members included Allan, as well as other legal services program leaders. This group focused on getting Congress to increase the LSC budget and organized Massachusetts lawyers around this need.

Another focus by the gang was to help legal services advocates understand that the courts were not the only way to make change. Going to the legislature and the administrative agencies and negotiating all the details with the parties can sometimes be preferable to seeking a court ruling which can be narrow in scope.

While 42 years is a long time to stay in one job, Allan did so in part because of the wonderful relationships that were built along the way and the shared commitment of his peers in the fight to address the justice gap. Allan has led MLRI from the early days when they focused their energy on representing organizations to today's need for the support of coalitions.

Allan would like to see programs be more willing to

consider new policies. He continues to visit the MLRI office a couple of days a week to help with the transition. He will continue to play a role with the Access to Justice Commission, as well as work with the Burgess Urban Fund of the Episcopal Church. He will also continue his role on the Boston Bar committee that is looking at Civil Gideon (the right to counsel in civil cases). Allan will certainly be missed but it is nice to know- gang or not- he is still in the fight.



Before...



...After! Thanks Allan!

Massachusetts
Legal
Assistance
Corporation

7 Winthrop Square, 2nd Floor
Boston, MA 02110-1245

Phone: 617-367-8544
Fax: 617-426-0656
<http://www.mlac.org>

Report on the ATJC Sub-Committee on Communications

By ANN LEAVENWORTH

Since our first meeting in December, we have been working to establish goals for the Client Group. We have now decided that our three major goals are: 1) to share information on legal resources for clients 2) to develop lay advocacy programs 3) to develop client networking and training.

Our first goal would begin to be implemented by replicating Springfield's "Day of Justice" (see page 4) as a model for use throughout the state. This would be helpful because it is an example of the Bar Association and Western Mass. Legal Services (WMLS) working directly with the community to provide legal information and resources.

The second goal includes accompanying those who must go to court without a lawyer, working directly with the homeless, duplicating WMLS's use of lay advocates in housing courts, and working with law schools for training and evaluation.

The third goal would start with a needs assessment to determine training. Our objectives

for a statewide meeting of clients, lobbying, and applying for grants would be utilized for all three objectives. The next meeting has been postponed until September. We welcome anyone who would like to help us reach our goals.

Ann is the client representative on the ATJC. She is also a WMLS board member. You can send her feedback at 413-736-0042 or holyfamilyrectory@verizon.net.

Save the Date: NLADA Conference 2011!

Where: Marriott Wardman Park Hotel,
Washington, D.C.

When: December 7 -10, 2011

MLAC will offer three scholarships to attend the NLADA Conference. Priority will be given to client board members who have never been to an NLADA Conference before.

Contact your program director by September 1st to inform him/her of your interest in attending the NLADA Conference.