

1982 - 1987

December 1982

Governor Edward King signs Chapter 221A of the General Laws creating the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) with funding from a surcharge on filing fees in civil cases.

March 1983

The MLAC statute becomes effective under an emergency proclamation signed by Governor Michael Dukakis. The Supreme Judicial Court appoints MLAC's board of directors.

August 1983

Lonnie Powers begins work as MLAC's executive director.

October 1983

The MLAC board of directors distributes \$425,000 in its first funding cycle, which runs from October 1983 to March 1984.

September 1984

MLAC and the Supreme Judicial Court contract for administration of the Disability Benefits Project.

June 1985

The Supreme Judicial Court approves the Massachusetts Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) rule.

October 1985

MLAC establishes the Medicare Advocacy Project.

January 1986

MLAC contracts with the Department of Public Welfare to subcontract with programs to assist recipients of state-funded General Relief in efforts to obtain federal Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income benefits.

May 1986

The IOLTA program begins operation in Massachusetts.

September 1986

The Immigration/Asylum Project begins providing critical legal services to recent arrivals to the United States.

December 1987

The first statewide Legal Needs Survey, co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Bar Association and the Boston Bar Association, documents that only 15 percent of the legal needs of the poor are being met.

1988 - 1993

September 1989

The Supreme Judicial Court makes the IOLTA program in Massachusetts mandatory.

April 1990

MLAC publishes the first issue of its newsletter, *The Reporter*.

May 1990

The first MLAC-hosted Emerging Issues forum, “Drugs, Legal Services and the Client Community,” is held at Roxbury Community College.

June 1990

MLAC undertakes new initiatives including the Poverty Law Fellowship, Minority Fellowship (now the Bart Gordon Fellowship), Office Automation Program and Client Outreach Program to improve delivery of legal services.

May 1992

After the state eliminates General Relief and establishes Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children, MLAC issues a special general support distribution due to an influx of clients.

May 1993

A federal court dismisses the Washington Legal Foundation’s constitutional challenge to the Massachusetts IOLTA program.

June 1993

MLAC’s second statewide conference, “Challenge and Change,” explores the direction of legal services.

July 1993

MLAC establishes the Battered Women’s Legal Assistance Project as a pilot project.

MLAC funds the Diversity Coalition as a permanent program.

June 1988

“The War on Poverty Revisited: Strategies for the Nineties,” the first statewide legal aid conference sponsored by MLAC, is held at Brandeis University.

July 1988

The filing fee surcharge on civil court filings, MLAC’s source of funding, is doubled from \$5 to \$10, except in small claims court, where it is raised from \$2 to \$4.

1994 - 1998

March 1994

E-mail is being used at a few legal aid programs.

July 1994

The Massachusetts legislature redirects civil court filing fees to the General Fund, replacing it with a budgetary appropriation, MLAC's new source of funding.

The second Legal Needs Survey is completed.

July 1995

MLAC loses the Department of Public Welfare contract for disability benefits, reducing funding by \$1 million.

The Massachusetts legislature triples funding for the Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project.

September 1995

Congress drastically cuts the Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) budget, imposes severe restrictions on LSC-funded programs and eliminates funding for support programs. Massachusetts programs lose \$4.4 million, which is 55 percent of their LSC funding. Massachusetts legal aid staff is reduced by 33 percent; legal aid programs begin to reorganize by separating their LSC funding from MLAC and other funding.

May 1996

The Commission on Equal Justice begins statewide public hearings.

July 1996

The Massachusetts legislature increases MLAC funding by \$2.2 million, partially making up for the previous year's cut in federal funding for legal aid programs.

October 1996

The Commission on Equal Justice issues its report, stating that federal cuts and restrictions are undermining legal services in Massachusetts.

January 1998

Neighborhood Legal Services posts community legal education materials online, a first for a Massachusetts legal aid program.

May 1998

The Massachusetts Bar Association and the Boston Bar Association join MLAC in forming the Equal Justice Coalition, kicking off with the Equal Justice Conference.

June 1998

In a Texas IOLTA case the United States Supreme Court rules that interest earned on client funds in IOLTA is the client's property.

July 1998

The Massachusetts legislature increases funding for the Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project by 50 percent.

1999 - 2003

May 2000

The Boston Bar Association and the Equal Justice Coalition sponsor the first “Walk to the Hill for Legal Aid” as part of an effort to increase MLAC’s legislative appropriation.

July 2000

The Massachusetts legislature expands MLAC funding by \$1.5 million.

October 2000

Masslegalservices.org, a groundbreaking Web site for advocates, debuts.

January 2001

MLAC and Massachusetts legal aid programs conduct the first Constituent Services Briefing for legislators and aides.

March 2001

The Massachusetts Bar Association joins the Boston Bar Association as a co-sponsor of the second “Walk to the Hill for Legal Aid.”

August 2002

The MLAC board of directors votes to establish the Massachusetts Legal Services Client Council to provide training and support to client board members of Massachusetts legal aid programs.

March 2003

The United States Supreme Court rules that IOLTA programs are constitutional, eliminating the most serious threat to this essential source of funding.

The first Access to Justice Conference is held in Fitchburg.

The State Planning Board, chaired by Chief Justice Wilkins (ret.), is created to make recommendations on a reconfiguration of Massachusetts legal aid programs.

July 2003

The Massachusetts legislature overrides Governor Mitt Romney’s veto of all MLAC funding.

The third Legal Needs Survey is released.

October 2003

A constitutional challenge to the Massachusetts IOLTA program is dropped.

2004 - 2008

July 2004

MLAC awards first grants based on newly created legal aid regions: East, Northeast, Southeast and Central-West.

February 2005

The Supreme Judicial Court establishes the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission.

July 2005

The Massachusetts legislature restores two-thirds of the \$1.5 million cut from MLAC's budget in 2002.

The first roll out of LegalFiles, a case management system for legal aid programs, begins.

January 2006

The MLAC board of directors votes to establish the Racial Justice Fellowship to expand the reach of legal services to communities that have difficulty accessing the justice system due to linguistic or cultural barriers.

June 2006

The Supreme Judicial Court appoints the first members of the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission.

September 2007

The Diversity Coalition begins statewide cultural competence workshops for staff of Massachusetts legal aid programs.

November 2007

MLAC hosts the first ever statewide conference for legal aid program board members.

May 2008

MLAC celebrates its 25th anniversary.

The Equal Justice Coalition celebrates its 10th anniversary.