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Legal Aid Link

Volume 4, Issue 2

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House Ways & Means: Level Funding for Legal Aid!

The House Ways and Means Committee recommended LEVEL FUNDING for the [MLAC line item](#) (0321-1600) for FY11. This is the same recommendation that the Governor included in his budget proposal released back in January - we are two for two.

The full House will debate the Ways and Means Committee's budget recommendations this week, and we don't anticipate any changes to the recommendation for the MLAC line item. Next stop for the budget is the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

Successful Collaboration to Protect Students

Two legal aid programs work together to protect students in Lynn alternative schools

by **Matthew Engel**, Senior Attorney at Disability Law Center

In October 2007, Children's Law Center of Massachusetts (CLCM) contacted the Disability Law Center (DLC) to request that DLC initiate an investigation of the Lynn Public Schools' alternative schools. CLCM was concerned about the influx of complaints they received relating to behavioral intervention practices in these schools. According to CLCM, the schools have historically relied on the frequent use of restraint, seclusion, filing of criminal charges against students and disciplinary exclusions.

DLC conducted its investigation in its designated role as the Massachusetts Protection and Advocacy agency for persons with disabilities. On March 25, DLC issued a [24-page investigation](#) report about the Lynn alternative schools. The report substantiated many of the allegations of mistreatment through interviews with parents, students and school staff, and the review of student records. In addition, DLC hired its own expert to independently assess the problems uncovered by the investigation.

[Read the rest of the article here](#)

MLAC News

Strategic Planning Update

The MLAC board has proposed to establish a reconstituted Planning Committee of about 11-12 people that includes a cross section of participants from the MLAC Board (3-4), Project Directors (4), and MLAC staff (3-4); at least one client representative will participate. MLAC Board Member Bob Foster has volunteered to chair the committee. The committee will use the situation assessment report to accomplish two goals: (1) identify the most appropriate issues to address and

(2) determine solutions that will be supported by as strong a consensus as possible. Work is underway to name the members of the committee. The hope is to constitute the committee by the middle of May.

Equal Justice Coalition

Following on the very successful Walk to the Hill, the EJC continues its advocacy for level funding for legal aid. Earlier this month, we delivered a support letter signed by Massachusetts law school deans - the signatories to the letter were Emily Spieler of Northeastern, John Garvey of Boston College, Maureen O'Rourke of Boston University, Martha Minow of Harvard, Bernard Keenan of Suffolk, Robert Ward of Southern New England (soon to be UMass School of Law, Dartmouth), John O'Brien of New England Law|Boston and Arthur Gaudio of Western New England. Also weighing in with their own support letter were 14 retired judges, including Chief Justice Wilkins and two former Supreme Judicial Court associate justices. You can read the letters on the [EJC website](#).

In the coming weeks, look for legal aid op-eds, penned by our general counsel and judge friends, in Central Massachusetts, Western Massachusetts and in the Boston Business Journal. Please stay tuned for the next EJC e-alert targeted at the Senate - don't forget to reply when you get the alert!

Diversity Coalition

The Diversity Steering Committee will convene a special meeting on April 30 to brainstorm and formulate a collaborative plan for the Diversity Coalition and the Diversity Steering Committee. The goal of the meeting is to decide on a prioritized list of actions to be taken by the Diversity Coalition and the Steering Committee in the next 12 months and to create a long-term plan to be executed over the next three years. The meeting will be hosted at MetroWest Legal Services.

Program Buzz

You can view complete news for each program by [clicking here](#) or clicking on the "read more" links.

Community Legal Services and Counseling Center

CLSACC welcomed a new office manager, **Graciela Lima Coto**, in March, and attorney **Lisa Weinberg** is now the proud parent of four year-old twins.

CLSACC feted its legal and mental health volunteers at the agency's annual volunteer appreciation event on April 21.

[Read more CLSACC news](#)

Greater Boston Legal Services

Recently, the Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services office of GBLS initiated a joint outreach project with the Community Action Agency of Somerville. The goal of the project is to Somerville inform tenants and owners facing foreclosure of their right to stay in their homes using the courts and other remedies.

Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts

Executive Assistant **Sarah Loy** and her husband, Brian Bickford, are the proud new parents of Maia Michaux Bickford-Loy, born on February 19. Congratulations!

Staff attorney **Anna Phillips** joined the board of the Cleghorn Neighborhood Center (CNC) in Fitchburg. The CNC, founded in 1968, works to build strong neighborhoods in Fitchburg and to strengthen the Latino and Latina immigrant communities in Fitchburg.

Merrimack Valley North Shore Legal Services

MVNS welcomes volunteer attorneys **Kerry Craven** and **Kristina Pechulis**, and it honored volunteer attorneys **Robin Munson** and **Jeff Varszegi** with its Pro Bono Attorneys of the Year award.

[Read more MVNS news](#)

National Consumer Law Center

NCLC is pleased to announce the newest addition to its staff, **Carol Kenner**, a retired US Bankruptcy Court judge for the District of Massachusetts and chief judge of the Bankruptcy Appellate Panel for the First Circuit.

NCLC was successful in extending the moratorium on utility shutoffs from March 15 to April 15.

The NCLC website now has links to helpful resources: a [student loan debt website](#) and four policy guides relating to [manufactured \(or mobile\) homes](#).

NCLC is also sponsoring a free webinar on May 12 called "Nuts and Bolts of Guardianship as Last Resort: The Basics on When to File and How to Maximize Autonomy." Space is limited. Reserve a "seat" at <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/899502696>.

[Read more NCLC news](#)

Western Massachusetts Legal Services

WMLS welcomes two new attorneys. **Francis Morris** has been brought on as the project attorney for the Foreclosure Prevention Alliance Project, which is funded by a Financial Literacy Grant from the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. The other is Skadden Fellow **Carrie Acus Love**. Carrie's project will focus on providing outreach and assistance to immigrant victims of domestic violence in Berkshire, Franklin and Hampshire Counties.

[Read more WMLS news](#)

Tech Tips

Googling 101

The *New York Times* recently published a list of 10 simple Google search tricks written by Simon Mackie. Here are a few of the more helpful ones:

"1. Use the "site:" operator to limit searches to a particular site."

You can use this trick if you want results from only one website. For instance, if you wanted eviction information, but only from the MassLegalHelp website, then in the Google search box you would type "[site:www.masslegalhelp.org](http://www.masslegalhelp.org) eviction".

"7. Exclude specific terms with the - operator."

Simply put "-" before any words you want to exclude. If you want to learn about roses, but not thorns, then you could search for "[roses -thorns](#)".

Read all the tips in the original article by [clicking here](#).

Important Dates

May 18, 2010 - MLAC Annual Meeting, 4 - 6 p.m. at the John Adams Courthouse in Boston

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