

# Legal Aid Link

Volume 8, Issue 1

## News in this issue...

[MLAC](#)

[Equal Justice Coalition](#)

[People](#)

[Event Recap](#)

[Save the Date](#)

[Resources](#)

[Advocacy](#)

[Media Highlights](#)

[People Pages](#)

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## MLAC

### MLAC Hosts Briefing for Legislative Aides

Representatives from the offices of more than 40 state legislators gathered at the Massachusetts State House on Feb. 10 to hear advice from legal aid experts on how to better help constituents with civil legal problems. The 13th annual Civil Legal Aid Constituent Services Briefing was sponsored by MLAC, and staff members from MLAC-funded programs offered presentations on topics ranging from healthcare to domestic violence. A new venue gave this year's event a fair-like atmosphere as programs from across the Commonwealth shared table space among the great columns of the Grand Staircase. Presentations on domestic violence/family law, employment and unemployment, foreclosure, eviction, homelessness, health care, and government benefits were made by experienced legal aid attorneys from a podium in front of the

Staircase. They were joined by Lauren Corcoran, Chief of Staff for Senator Gale Candaras who spoke of the importance of having a partnership with the local legal aid program in a legislator's district, and MLAC Executive Director Lonnie Powers who spoke of the significant, direct economic benefits to the clients and to the Commonwealth from the work of legal aid. Programs participating included CLA, GBLS, CLSACC, MWLS, BCLAB, SCCLS, NLS, CLCM, MVNS, DLC, and MLRI.



*From left, Lauren Corcoran, chief of staff for Sen. Gale Candaras; CLA attorney Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies; MWLS attorney Jennifer Ollington; and MLRI attorney Liza Hirsch at the Constituent Services Briefing.*

Legal Aid attorneys who presented were Monica Halas, GBLS; Medha D. Makhlof, CLA/CWJC; Marc Potvin, NLS; Liza Hirsch, MLRI; Jennifer Ollington, MWLS; and Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies, CLA/CWJC. Thanks to you all!

#### **Fiscal Director to leave MLAC**

MLAC fiscal director Vahe Karlozian will leave MLAC on April 11. In a message to the MLAC board, Executive Director Lonnie Powers thanked Vahe for his service and dedication to legal aid. "Vahe has decided to step back from full time work for now and to assess what his next adventure will be," Lonnie said. "We have benefited greatly from his wisdom and hard work during his tenure and wish him the best. He asked that I be sure to tell you how impressed he has been with the mission of legal aid and the dedication of everyone who seeks to advance that mission; also, how much he has enjoyed working with each of you and the program staff."

#### **Trial Court Justice Discusses Court Improvements with MLAC Board**

The Massachusetts Trial Court will continue to evolve through specialization of judges and integration of administrative functions, according to Trial Court Chief Justice Paula M. Carey. Justice Carey previewed some of the upcoming changes at MLAC's monthly board meeting on Feb. 27. "The specialization of judges in areas of expertise is the feature of the Massachusetts court system that makes the quality of our judicial decision-making among the best in the nation," Justice Carey wrote in a recent op-ed in Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly. "Anything short of that would be unacceptable for the people of the Commonwealth."

## **Equal Justice Coalition**

#### **Walk to the Hill Draws More than 550 Legal Aid Advocates to the State House**

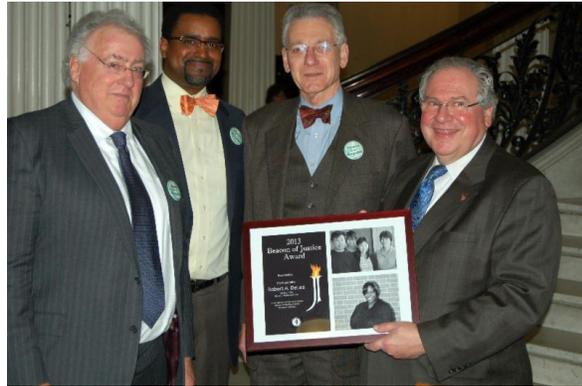
Chief Justice Roderick Ireland addressed more than 550 lawyers who gathered to participate in the 15th annual Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid Jan. 30 at the Massachusetts State House. Justice Ireland asked participants to urge their legislators to support increased state funding for civil legal aid. "Civil legal aid attorneys help to level the playing field," said Ireland. "They are committed to the ideal of equal access to justice for all. However, they are forced to turn away over half of the people who come to them for help. We are here today to help balance the scales of justice." Thank you to the many legal aid staff members who volunteered to make this year's Walk a success. [For more details and photos of the event, visit the EJC website.](#)



*Former legal aid client Charlene Julce shared how legal aid helped save her house from foreclosure at Walk to the Hill.*

### EJC Honors Legislators with Beacon of Justice and Champion of Justice Awards

The Equal Justice Coalition honored six current and former Massachusetts lawmakers with awards at a reception on Feb. 26 at the Massachusetts State House. The honorees were selected for their outstanding support of state funding for civil legal aid through the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC). MLAC funds and supports organizations that provide civil legal assistance to low-income residents facing critical problems, such as domestic violence and eviction due to foreclosure. House Speaker Rep. Robert A. DeLeo (D-Winthrop) and House Ways & Means Chair Brian S. Dempsey (D-Haverhill) received Beacon of Justice awards for their longstanding leadership and support for civil legal aid funding in 2013. Senate President Therese Murray (D-Plymouth), Senate Ways & Means Chair Stephen M. Brewer (D-Barre), Congresswoman Katherine Clark, and former Rep. Eugene O'Flaherty received Champion of Justice awards for their exceptional support of civil legal aid throughout their legislative careers. [More information and photos.](#)



*From left, EJC Chair John Carroll, MLAC Chair Rahsaan Hall, MLAC Executive Director Lonnie Powers and House Speaker Rep. Robert DeLeo with his Beacon of Justice Award.*

### Get Involved

Your voice helps make sure that Gov. Patrick and the Massachusetts Legislature understand the importance of legal aid funding. You can follow the EJC on Twitter ([@EqualJusticeMA](#)), like the EJC Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EqualJusticeMA](#)) and sign up for action alerts at [www.equaljusticecoalition.org](#).

## People

### CLA Welcomes New Staff Members

Staff Attorney **Andrea Carrillo** recently joined CLA's HomeCorps team in the Worcester office. Andrea most recently worked on bankruptcy and consumer matters at Greater Boston Legal Services both during and after law school.

Staff Attorney **Chester Fernandez** joined CLA's HomeCorps team at the beginning of March and works out of the Springfield office. Chester most recently worked at the public defender's district court office in Northampton.

Staff Attorney **Amanda (Mandiey) Winalski** has also joined CLA's HomeCorps team in Springfield. Mandiey recently got her LLM in Animal Law after working as a litigation associate at the Connecticut branch of a large law firm.

Staff Attorney **Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies** recently joined CWJC, where she focuses on benefits work and also works with the Family Advocates of Central Massachusetts medical-legal partnership. Weayonnoh most recently worked at the Justice Center of Southeast Massachusetts (the subsidiary of South Coastal Counties Legal Services) with its medical-legal partnership.

**Peter Benjamin** has returned to legal aid as CLA's Litigation Director. Peter worked at Western Massachusetts Legal Services for many years before entering private practice in 2009. Peter primarily works out of CLA's Springfield and Worcester offices.

**Maureen Harrington** recently joined CLA as a part-time development associate in the Worcester office. Maureen has held various development positions over the last 15 years, including positions with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro West, UMass Memorial Foundation and the American Heart Association.

**Kebby Lee** recently began as the Executive Assistant at CLA in Worcester. Kebby has extensive experience as an executive assistant and has been an active volunteer in North Worcester County.

CLA attorney **Valerie Zolezzi-Wyndham** has been named a "Where Health Meets Justice" fellow for 2014 by the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA). The new fellowship is designed to build healthcare expertise in the legal aid community, according to NLADA. In addition to Valerie, 23 other senior level staff from legal aid agencies in 21 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico were selected as inaugural Fellows.

GBLS attorney **Pauline Quirion** received a "Keepers of the Garden" community service award from the Boston Housing Authority's Warren Gardens Resident Association at their "Unity Day" celebration in November. Pauline and Ventura Dennis, MLAC's Bart Gordon Fellow, discussed Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) and GBLS' CORI Re-entry Project.

MVNS lost a friend and longtime staff attorney **Jennifer L Kurrus**, who passed away on Dec. 31. Most recently an MVNS HomeCorps supervising attorney, Jen spent 30 years at MVNS as its elder attorney and later consumer attorney. She was dedicated and brilliant and always empathetic to her clients' needs. We miss her very much.

MVNS Staff Attorney **Zona Sharfman** wed Dan Beaulieu in February. After her honeymoon in beautiful and warm Mexico, she has returned to her practice in freezing Lowell.

MVNS Executive Director **Ken MacIver** is retiring on March 31. Ken said, "It has been a privilege to work with such a great staff that has consistently produced the finest work for our clients."

Former NLS Executive Director **Sheila Casey** is now the Administrator of the Trail Court's Specialty Courts Initiative. She began her new position in February.

Senior Staff Attorney **Veronica Serrato** of the Volunteer Lawyers Project's Family Law Unit will be leaving March 7 to become the Executive Director of the Greater Boston Citizenship Initiative, focusing on immigration work. Veronica began her employment at VLP in 2005 and has overseen VLP's family law and guardianship practice. She has provided high quality legal services to low-income clients, trained and mentored volunteer attorneys and supervised VLP's attorneys and other staff. Over the last few years she has been instrumental in ensuring access to justice for the limited English proficient (LEP) population through her work on the state's Language Access Coalition, her supervision and direction of the Massachusetts Language Access Fellow, and her leadership of VLP's internal LEP Working Group.

MWLS hired Attorney **Margaretta Kroeger** in September as a full time benefits attorney. She previously worked in the elder, health and disability unit of GBLS as a Skadden fellow for two years.

In December 2013, MWLS hired Attorney **Michael Moloney** as a full time housing attorney to work under a Civil Gideon grant. Attorney Moloney previously worked at SCCLS first as an AmeriCorp volunteer for two years and then as an attorney for one year.

Former MWLS supervising attorney **Steve Matthews** was promoted to the position of Advocacy Director in the fall of 2013. Attorney Matthews will now oversee the legal work in the office, coordinate impact advocacy and training needs and carry a small caseload.

## Event Recap

### **GBLS Lobby Event for Civil Legal Aid Funding Sees Record Number of Participants**

On January 15, 2014, more than 130 enthusiastic individuals visited their legislators to ask them to support an increase in civil legal aid funding in the FY15 state budget. They included Greater Boston Legal Services clients, client caucus members, volunteers, and representatives from community groups and organizations that partner with GBLS. GBLS staff, fellows, volunteers, and partners such as the Chinese Progressive Association, Chelsea Collaborative, Brazilian Immigrant Center, Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence, Centro Presidente and Dominican Development Center did a great job of recruiting people to participate and participating themselves.



*Legal aid clients on the steps of the Massachusetts State House on Jan. 15.*

### **MLRI Hosts Screening of Robert Reich Film**

MLRI partnered with a state lawmaker and several community organizations to host a screening of Robert Reich's award-winning documentary film *Inequality for All* on Feb. 26 at the Massachusetts State House. Reich's film tackles one of the most serious issues of our time: the widening income inequality in our nation and its consequences. In a post-screening forum, a panel of experts engaged the audience in a discussion of structural causes and manifestations of income inequality; racial, gender and class-related barriers to economic opportunities; the consequences of deteriorating anti-poverty and social safety net programs that stabilize struggling families; and the devastating, long-term impact of the widening income gap on the nation's economy. The screening was hosted by Rep. Jay R. Kaufman (D-Lexington), MLRI, Raise Up Massachusetts, Crittenton Women's Union, Massachusetts Communities Action Network, Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts, Massachusetts Interfaith Worker Justice, Jewish Alliance for Law & Social Action, Progressive Massachusetts, Restaurant Opportunities Center of Boston, SEIU 32 BJ District 615, Massachusetts Association for Community Action/MASSCAP, Budget for All, and United for a Fair Economy.

## Save the Date

### **Building Bridges Through Language Access Advocacy and Collaboration: 2014 Conference**

Every day in Massachusetts limited English proficient (LEP) individuals face countless barriers when navigating the legal system and accessing needed public services. This conference seeks to raise awareness about the need for language access in our communities, provide tools and resources to meet the needs of these communities and build collaboration to eliminate barriers and promote change. This conference is for advocates from community based organizations, legal services and civil rights organizations. Speakers will highlight the current state of language access in Massachusetts in a variety of forums, language access legal obligations and much more. We hope to provide the necessary tools and resources for participants to leave this conference ready and equipped to further language access in their work. More information and online registration coming soon at [www.masslegalservices.org/library-directory/language-access](http://www.masslegalservices.org/library-directory/language-access). Friday, April 4, 9:30 am, UMASS Medical School, 55 North Lake Ave., Worcester.

### **MCLE and Partners to Host Second Annual Legal Services Conference**

The 2014 Legal Services Conference will bring together the Massachusetts legal aid community.

Legal aid and pro bono advocates throughout the state will convene to discuss the history and future of legal aid delivery systems. Participants will discuss how to connect with the mission of legal aid as advocates, the next steps in the development of the legal aid system. They'll also examine innovative strategies and coalition building methods and explore important aspects of legal aid work such as racial justice and community awareness. Shriver Center Director John Bouman will give the opening keynote address. [www.mcle.org](http://www.mcle.org).

*Monday, May 12, 9:30 a.m., 10 Winter Pl., Boston.*

#### **2014 Nancy King Memorial Golf Tournament to Benefit MWLS**

MWLS' signature fundraising event is expected to attract more than 125 individuals to play on a historic golf course, participate in a silent auction, and more. [www.mwlegal.org](http://www.mwlegal.org)

*Monday, June 2, 11 a.m., Framingham Country Club, Framingham.*

## **Resources**

#### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Issues 2014 Federal Poverty Guidelines**

Charts with these guidelines for households up to 8 members, along with annual, monthly and weekly calculations at a number of different thresholds (115% of poverty, 125% of poverty, 187.5% of poverty, 200% of poverty and 300% of poverty) have been posted on [MassLegalServices.org](http://MassLegalServices.org) at the following url: <http://www.masslegalservices.org/content/federal-poverty-guidelines>. 2013 charts are also available.

#### **Resources from the National Consumer Law Center**

##### *Free Reports:*

- [Fast Track Foreclosure Laws: Are They Headed in the Right Direction? \[PDF\]](#), January 2014
- [The Sallie Mae Saga: A Government-Created, Student Debt Fueled Profit Machine \[PDF\]](#), January 2014
- [Solving the Credit Conundrum: Helping Consumers' Credit Reports Impaired by the Foreclosure Crisis and Great Recession \[PDF\]](#), December 2013
- [Riddled Returns: How Errors and Fraud by Paid Tax Preparers Put Consumers at Risk and What States Can Do](#), November 2013

##### *E-Alerts for Advocates*

[Sign up here](#) for NCLC e-alerts with news, NCLC legal treatises and articles covering case developments, practice tips and resources for attorneys.

##### *Fair Debt Collection Practices Conference*

San Antonio, Texas. March 7-8, 2014. Hope to see you there! [More information](#).

## **Advocacy & Program Updates**

#### **Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder Streamlines Search for Legal Help**

A new web tool launched in early February offers potential legal aid clients a quicker way to find appropriate legal resources for a wide range of legal problems. The Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder is available at [www.MassLRF.org](http://www.MassLRF.org) or [www.MassLegalServices.org/findlegalaid](http://www.MassLegalServices.org/findlegalaid). It's a product of a collaboration between MLRI and MJP (now CLA) and its development was funded by a Technology Innovations Grant (TIG) from the Legal Services Corporation. One of the objectives of this TIG was to create a web tool that would help users determine whether they should apply for assistance at a legal aid program. On the website homepage, the user answers a few screening-type questions, and then hits search. The results page will then show whether there is a match to a legal aid program, and give them information on how to apply. If there is no program match, the

results page will also return links to alternative resources such as lawyer for the day programs, government programs and bar association lawyer referral, as well as links to relevant legal education pages on MassLegalHelp or other trusted websites, including Massachusetts Trial Court, Social Security Administration, NCLC and others. The tool is powered by a new database containing more than 600 legal issues, the priorities for participating legal aid programs, and many additional alternative resources available to potential clients.

#### **CLA Becomes Sole LSC Grantee for Central and Western Massachusetts**

There have recently been some significant changes in the legal aid programs in the central and western parts of the state. Until recently, the Mass. Justice Project (MJP) was the recipient of federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funding for the past several years, providing intake, referral and hotline services for clients in central and western Mass. and administering the pro bono Volunteer Lawyers Service (VLS) program. At the same time, Community Legal Aid was the MLAC grantee for the region; CLA was formed when Legal Assistance Corp. of Central Mass. and Western Mass. Legal Services came together in July 2011. As of January 2014, CLA became the LSC grantee in the region (while remaining as the MLAC grantee) and MJP was dissolved. As part of this restructuring, CLA formed a subsidiary company, the Central West Justice Center (CWJC), which does not receive any LSC funding and handles cases that CLA cannot handle because of LSC restrictions. Former MJP staff are working for either CLA or CWJC; several former CLA staff are also working for the CWJC. CWJC has offices in Worcester, Springfield, and Pittsfield.

#### **MWLS and CLA Begin Partnership with Framingham Health Center**

The MetroWest Health Foundation awarded a grant to CLA and MWLS in January to establish a medical-legal partnership with the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center in Framingham. MWLS hired Attorney Katie Condon to staff that position. Ms. Condon started at MWLS in February 2014. She had previously been volunteering as a staff attorney at BCLAB working on the elder project.

#### **Chelsea Collaborative Recognizes GBLS With Social Justice Award**

GBLS received a Social Justice Award from the Chelsea Collaborative in December 2013 at the Holiday Gala that also commemorated the Collaborative's 25th anniversary. When it announced the award, the Collaborative stated, "Greater Boston Legal Services has been a key partner of the Chelsea Collaborative and together, we have worked successfully to achieve economic, social and environmental justice for so many in our community. In reflecting on our 25 years of organizing work and the tremendous partner GBLS has been in so many areas, we would like to acknowledge GBLS as a whole..."

#### **MassLegalServices.org Now Features a Consumer Law Email Group**

The new group will serve as a forum for advocates interested in consumer issues such as debt collection, banking, credit and identity theft issues, and related topics. This list is not for foreclosure issues; there is a separate Foreclosure Defense group for that topic. To join the consumer email list group, follow these steps:

1. Log in to MassLegalServices.org (If you forgot your username, use your email address; you can reset your password using the "request new password" link in the log in box).
2. Once you are logged in, click the Join Email Groups tab from the menu. This brings you to a page with groups you can subscribe to.
3. Find the Consumer group on the list -- click the "Request Group Membership" link in the far right column, then click the "join" button on the following screen.
4. If you have any problems joining, contact Rochelle Hahn, rhahn@mlri.org

## Media Highlights

These are just some highlights of recent media coverage. For a full list, visit the [News](#) section of MLAC's website.

### More funding needed for MA legal aid services (WWLP)

CLA Executive Director Jonathan Mannina and CLA Director of Development Steve Taviner are interviewed.

### Workers see 'silent crisis' among elderly with mental health needs (State House News)

GBLS attorney Betsey Crimmins sees people when they are on the verge of losing their housing, a situation that often stems from untreated mental health issues.

### South Shore legislators suggest ways to address housing crisis (Brockton Enterprise)

State Senators say they will support increased civil legal aid funding. MLAC Executive Director Lonnie Powers is quoted.

## "People Pages"

[CLICK HERE](#) to print "People Pages," an alphabetical directory of Massachusetts Legal Services staff members and their contact information (NOTE: You must log in to MassLegalServices.org in order to access the list). You can also look up staff individually by last name using the search function on MassLegalServices.org.

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