

Legal Aid Link

A Newsletter for Massachusetts Civil Legal Services Programs

In This Issue

[Holiday Wishes](#)

[Statewide Board Member Conference](#)

[The Buzz](#)

[Diversity Coalition News](#)

[Bart Gordon Fellowship Luncheon](#)

[Client Council News](#)

[IT Update](#)

[Important Dates](#)

Quick Links

[MLAC Home](#)
[Newsletter Archive](#)
[Related Topics](#)
[More On Us](#)

HOLIDAY WISHES

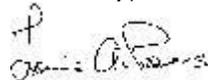
From the MLAC Executive Director

Welcome to the second edition of *Legal Aid Link*, a newsletter developed for our civil legal aid programs. With a small increase in funding from the Commonwealth and a large increase in IOLTA income, it has been exciting year for us.

Here at MLAC, the Diversity Coalition has had a successful series of training sessions with legal service staff across the state. Program board members got a chance to meet and learn more about their role in civil legal aid programs in our first ever statewide board member conference. We have also made great technology improvements with the introduction of LegalFiles and the statewide help desk service. We remain as busy as ever.

After the holidays we will be gearing up for the new legislative campaign. We appreciate all your hard work this year and thank you for all your efforts as we look forward to 2008.

Sincerely,



Lonnie A. Powers



STATEWIDE BOARD MEMBER CONFERENCE

Board Members Attend First Ever Conference

On Thursday November 29th, MLAC hosted "**Civil Legal Aid - Our Common Wealth**", the first ever statewide conference for legal aid program board members, at the Crowne Plaza in Natick. Over 70 people, representing fourteen programs and four regions, attended the conference, including approximately 45 board members from across the state. Attendees took part in a panel discussion led by client board members on incorporating client voices in legal services and

also learned about board members' roles and opportunities with regard to the state legislature. They were then able to attend breakout sessions featuring workshops on different topics. The event was extremely well received by participants, and MLAC plans to host similar conferences for board members in the future.

THE BUZZ

Boston College Legal Assistance Bureau (BCLAB)

Maritza Karmely recently joined BCLAB as Assistant Clinical Professor of Law. She was formerly a staff attorney at Casa Myrna Vazquez in Boston and a litigation associate with Boston law firms Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom and Todd & Weld. She participates in the Family Law Task Force Against Domestic Violence's statewide advocacy efforts, and will be teaching the Women & the Law and Civil Litigation clinics.

Center for Law and Education (CLE)

Joanne Karger has joined CLE as a staff attorney. She has extensive experience promoting the educational rights of children and youth, particularly students with disabilities.

CLE co-director **Paul Weckstein** has been appointed to the American Bar Association Commission on Youth at Risk.

Sam Longnecker and **Lili Lockhart** are AmeriCorps fellows at CLE who have joined **Jack Schwarz**, who is in his second year of service, in supporting Boston Public School parents working with school personnel to close the achievement gap.

Community Legal Services & Counseling Center

CLSSAC and Greater Boston Legal Services were awarded the **Marie Siraco Community Activism Award** by **RESPOND**, a domestic violence agency in Somerville, for its legal work with survivors of domestic violence.

Mojdeh Rohani is CLSACC's new Associate Clinical Director. She is a Licensed Social Worker who previously worked at the International Institute of Boston as Director of Social Services and earlier as Clinical Social Worker.

Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS)

Family law attorney **Manisha Bhatt**, has been named by the South Asian Bar Association of Greater Boston as both their "Member of the Year" and "Board Member of the Year".

Law & Politics and *Boston Magazine* have included GBLS attorneys **Nadine Cohen**, **Nancy Kelly** and **Pauline Quirion**

on their "Super Lawyers 2007" list.

The **Massachusetts Statewide Independent Living Council** presented GBLS with its **Organization Advocacy Award** for "outstanding advocacy efforts in making the MBTA accessible to all persons with disabilities within our Commonwealth."

Legal Assistance Corp. of Central Mass. (LACCM)

LACCM is pleased to welcome **Melissa Pomfred, Jane Edmonstone** and **Thoi Mai**. Previously, Melissa worked in a private practice on employment law issues and spent time at Boston's Homeless Services coordinating their education programs. Jane graduated from Northeastern University Law School in the spring of 2007. As a paralegal, Thoi Mai will focus on outreach to the Vietnamese community of Worcester County.

LACCM welcomes back **Valerie Zolezzi-Wyndham**, who has been at the Center for Legal Aid Education for several years. LACCM also congratulates **Ray Mestre**, who has been promoted to senior attorney and **Tina Paradiso**, who has been promoted to senior supervising attorney.

LACCM has received a one-year **Fair Housing Initiatives Program Grant** from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to continue its fair housing testing and enforcement project. It has also received a **two-year VAWA grant** from the U.S. Department of Justice to continue its partnerships with local battered women's service providers to assist victims of domestic violence with their restraining orders and other family cases.

Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services (MCLS)

MCLS and other groups are urging passage of state Representative Ruth Balsler's **House Bill 1313**, which would bar the practice of placing mentally ill prison inmates in solitary confinement and create secure residential treatment units (RTUs) for mentally ill inmates. *The Boston Globe* recently ran a spotlight series on the cruelty suffered by mentally ill prisoners in solitary confinement, and MCLS Director **Leslie Walker** said, "The Department of Correction has been aware of the problem for decades, and yet it has never committed to ending the practice."

[Read The Boston Globe Spotlight Series](#)

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI)

Jamie Gilmore recently joined MLRI as Director of Development. He was previously Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations for the YMCA of Greater Boston.

Debbie Silva is MLRI's new legislative director, replacing **Margaret Monsell** as MLRI's chief lobbyist. Margaret is now working on employment law at MLRI.

Attorney **Judith Liben** has testified before Congress about the plight of tenants in foreclosed properties. Her testimony and advocacy work have advanced legislation on state and national levels and generated media coverage in the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and CNN.



Merrimack Valley North Shore Legal Services (MVNS)

MVNS welcomes **June Beack**, Staff Attorney (Bart Gordon Fellow); **Deepinder Singh Mayell**, Staff attorney; **Katie Bryson**, AmeriCorps Volunteer; **Shaun Hevey**, Law Student Intern; **Liana Jemiolo**, Paralegal Student Intern; **Catherine Rudolph**, Attorney Volunteer.

MVNS says goodbye to Senior Aides **Joan Sheehan** and **Laurie Stanton**. Laurie now works at the **Legal Advocacy and Resource Center (LARC)**.

Western Massachusetts Legal Services (WMLS)

Tina Sanchez has been promoted to Associate Director for Advocacy at WMLS.

Colleen Lippiello has been promoted to managing attorney in the WMLS Hampden County (Springfield) office.

DIVERSITY COALITION NEWS

R.E.A.L. Training

Diversity Coalition staff **Joyce Allen-Beckford** and **Andy Garcia** designed this fall's **Let's Get R.E.A.L. Training** with self-discovery in mind. The five hour training engaged participants in several interactive exercises focused on the different dimensions of diversity. Participants expanded their awareness of diversity issues, challenged long-held assumptions and learned key concepts.



For the first time, the Diversity Coalition brought the training to every part of the state, offering the training 11 times in 8 different cities from September to October. This innovative and ambitious approach resulted in over 250 people - nearly half of all program staff, being trained.

The evaluations were overwhelmingly positive and revealed the training offered something for everyone and provided a safe, structured environment for people with different perspectives to grapple with difficult issues. The Diversity Coalition planned this training as the beginning of what will be a meaningful and impactful process of change and growth.

BART GORDON FELLOWSHIP LUNCHEON

New and Current Fellows Welcomed

On November 27th, the Diversity Coalition hosted a special luncheon for attorneys of color at the Rustic Kitchen in Boston. The event served to welcome the current and new Bart Gordon Fellows - **Jennifer Rocha (SMLS)** and **June Beack (MVNS)** - and the first ever Racial Justice Fellow, **Mithra Merryman (GBLS)**. **Professor David Hall** of Northeastern University was the invited guest speaker. His talk, "The Unique Roles of Attorneys of Color in Massachusetts Legal Services," inspired and motivated close to 30 attendees. Professor Hall validated the challenges in their work and its tremendous value to the communities we serve.

CLIENT COUNCIL NEWS

Peggy Santos Receives National Award

MLAC board member and Client Council Steering Committee member **Peggy Santos** received the Mary Ellen Hamilton Award from the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA) for her outstanding service to the client community. Peggy received this accolade at the NLADA 2007 Annual Conference in Tucson Arizona. We applaud her for this well deserved recognition of her talent, energy and leadership. According to Peggy, this award is "validation of all the work that all client board members do."



IT UPDATE

Statewide Help Desk Open

The new statewide help desk for tech support opened this fall. Support is available on weekdays from 9AM to 5PM. The help desk phone number is **866-632-2720**.

IMPORTANT DATES

January MLAC Board Meeting Cancelled

The January meeting of the MLAC board will not be taking place because a board retreat is scheduled in place of the meeting. The next MLAC board meeting will be held on February 28, 2008 at the Massachusetts Bar Association ([map](#)).

MLAC 25th Anniversary Celebration

MLAC welcomes staff from all programs to join us at MLAC's 25th anniversary celebration. Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court will be honored for her commitment to civil legal aid. The event will be held at 5:30pm on Tuesday May 13, 2008 at the Marriott Copley Place in Boston ([map](#)).