

Legal Aid Link

Volume 7, Issue 4

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Want to see your news in Legal Aid Link? Send it to the person responsible for communications and development at your organization. The next issue will be published in February 2014.

[Visit our website](#) to read previous issues.



MLAC

MLAC Hosts Statewide Conference on Diversity Issues

More than 150 legal aid professionals from across the state attended a conference on Sept. 27 that examined structural and institutional racism as well as biases in legal services. Antiracist expert Tim Wise presented a keynote address on the impact of racism. Stuart Rossman of the National Consumer Law Center presented the challenges of racial bias from a national perspective. Jason Reece of the Kirwan Institute at Ohio State University presented findings from opportunity mapping of racial disparities in Massachusetts. Camille Holmes of the National Legal Aid and Defenders Association discussed legal services' perspectives on racial justice, diversity and inclusion. You can view videos of the presentations at [the Diversity Coalition website](#). [Click here](#) for photos taken at the conference.



Antiracist expert Tim Wise delivers the keynote speech at MLAC's diversity conference on Sept. 27

\$17m in State Funding Needed for Legal Aid in FY2015

MLAC will ask Gov. Patrick and the Massachusetts legislature to appropriate \$17 million for civil legal aid in FY 2015. The amount represents a \$4 million increase over the current year's appropriation. MLAC's share of IOLTA revenue is projected to decline again this year to a level that is 85 percent lower than in FY2008. An increase of \$4 million would allow some increases in grants to prevent or postpone more staffing cuts and service reductions. For a fact sheet explaining the need for the increase, visit www.mlac.org.

MLAC Seeks Nominations to Fill Board Member Position

MLAC board member Judith Martinez's term will be up in March 2014. Please contact Danielle Hines-Graham (dhines@mlac.org) if you know of an individual who may be willing to serve on the MLAC board and who is currently serving or has served in the past five years on a legal services program board.

Call for News: The Spring Issue of the *Unbeatable Advocate*

The next issue of the client newsletter, the *Unbeatable Advocate*, will be produced in February 2014. If you have any story ideas, please contact the newsletter team at advocate@mlac.org.

Equal Justice Coalition

Call for Walk to the Hill Volunteers

The 15th annual Walk to the Hill For Civil Legal Aid will be held at the Massachusetts State House on Jan. 30, 2014. The Equal Justice Coalition relies on legal aid staff and law students who volunteer their time to ensure the smooth running of Walk to the Hill, which is one of the largest lobby days of the year in Massachusetts. If you are interested in volunteering on the morning of Jan. 30, please email Danielle (dhines@mlac.org). For more information on the Equal Justice Coalition and Walk to the Hill, please [visit their website](#) or contact Deb Silva (dsilva@equaljusticecoalition.org).

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](https://twitter.com/EqualJusticeMA)), like the EJC Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EqualJusticeMA) and sign up for action alerts at www.equaljusticecoalition.org.

People

Long-time Massachusetts Law Reform Institute attorney **Tony Winsor** passed away Nov. 4. Tony graduated from Harvard University in 1958, served two years in the U.S. Army, and graduated from Harvard Law School in 1963. He worked six years at Hale & Dorr and spent 39 happy years at Mass Law Reform Institute until his retirement in 2009. Tony had a distinguished career there pursuing his passion of bringing justice to the disadvantaged. Among his many achievements were bringing reform to the CORI system and requiring interpreters in courts and emergency rooms. He was also extensively engaged at the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts for over 50 years and served 30 years on the board of Prisoners' Legal Services. Tony's life and legacy was detailed in a Nov. 22 [obituary in the Boston Globe](#). A memorial service, with a celebration to follow, was held on Nov. 23 at 1:00 pm at the First Unitarian Society of Newton. Donations are encouraged for the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, 99 Chauncy St, Boston 02111 or the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, 211 Congress St., Boston 02110.



Greater Boston Legal Services Family Law Unit Attorney **Manisha Bhatt** was selected by Community Action Programs, Inter City, Inc. (CAPIC) in Chelsea as this year's recipient for the Public Service Peace-Building Award. The award was presented Oct. 25 at CAPIC's 13th Annual CommUNITY Breakfast. Manisha was chosen from among many nominations because of her ongoing commitment to raising awareness of domestic violence and ensuring all survivors are treated with compassion. Manisha shared her experience working to address domestic violence [in a](#)



recent [BBA blog post](#). Manisha was also recently named by Governor Deval Patrick to the Judicial Nominating Commission.

Three attorneys from MLAC-funded civil legal aid organizations were recognized by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly as "Top Women of the Law" at a ceremony on Oct. 31. **Monica Halas** of Greater Boston Legal Services, **Linda Landry** of Disability Law Center and **Barbara Mitchell** of Community Legal Services and Counseling Center. Nnena E. J. Odum of Harvard Law School's Legal Services Center and Veronica Serrato of the Volunteer Lawyers Project were also honored. The lawyers were selected for their inspiring contributions to social justice and advocacy.

Greater Boston Legal Services Senior Attorney **Deborah Filler** has been selected to receive the 2013 John Phillip Sousa Award from Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services for her tremendous and energetic work as an advocate for older adults in the two cities and across the Commonwealth.

Greater Boston Legal Services Attorney **Sherley Rodriguez** (formerly Cruz) and GBLS volunteer attorney **Natacha Thomas** (pictured at right) were selected by the Women's Bar Association to participate in the 2013-14 Women's Leadership Initiative. This is a competitive program that provides mentoring and leadership development for women attorneys in Massachusetts who have been identified as rising stars in the profession. Their selection demonstrates their proven talent and promise as leaders.



Attorney **Michael Weinhold** has joined the Merrimack Valley-North Shore Legal Services HomeCorps Project. Mike's experience includes working in the office of Attorney General Martha Coakley as a loan modification specialist, volunteering at MVNS as well as with the Lawyer of the Day Program facilitated by Neighborhood Legal Services. He was a law clerk at Gray, Ritter & Graham and interned at the Massachusetts Superior Court and the United States House of Representatives. Michael is a graduate of Washington University School of Law and Utrecht University School of Law in the Netherlands.

Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP) honored Massachusetts Law Reform Institute's Senior Housing Attorney **Judith Liben** for her work to preserve affordable housing and to promote fair and equal access to housing. Eastern Bank President Robert F. Rivers presented Judith with her award at MBHP's Sixth Annual Founders Celebration on Nov. 13.



Jennifer Navas Portillo has joined MVNS as an AmeriCorps volunteer. Jennifer will be focusing on intake, family law, veteran outreach and SNAP issues. Jennifer brings with her experience as a Special Assistant to the Dean of Students and a participant in the Bias Response Workgroup both at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

Jay McManus, Executive Director of the Children's Law Center of Massachusetts, was honored on Sept. 27 with the Boston Bar Association's 2013 John G. Brooks Award for his selfless work on behalf of children. The award was presented at the BBA Annual Meeting Luncheon at the Boston Convention Center.

Merrimack Valley-North Shore Legal Services attorney **Jennifer Kurrus** and Community Legal Aid paralegal **Wendy Kane** were honored with the first annual Bill Brainard Award at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute's 45th anniversary celebration on Nov. 20. Jennifer worked on the Elder Law Project and provided support to the benefits and housing units at MVNS. In 2012, she became a supervising attorney in the Attorney General's HomeCorps Borrower Representation Project. Wendy has 35 years of experience representing clients in public benefits administrative hearings and providing support class action lawsuits brought on behalf of her clients. The awards were presented by MLRI Board member and retired Center for Public Representation attorney Pat Rae. MLRI established the Brainard Award to honor Bill Brainard, a beloved legal services attorney and longtime MLRI Board member, who passed away in 2009. The award honors attorney and non-attorney advocates in local legal services programs who have demonstrated excellence in client representation and an exemplary commitment to client needs.



Jennifer Kurrus receives her award

Event Recap

South Coastal Counties Legal Services Hosts Second Annual Equal Justice Celebration

More than 280 guests attend the 2013 Equal Justice Celebration on Nov. 14 at the Narrows Center for the Arts in Fall River. The event raised just over \$35,000. Guests were welcomed by Attorney Matt Bresette, Co-Chair of the SCCLS Board of Directors, and SCCLS Executive Director Susan Nagl. Guests then heard from one of the agency's former clients, Magdalie Lamore, whose extended family was saved from homelessness thanks to SCCLS' legal representation. During this engaging speaking program, MLAC Executive Director Lonnie Powers presented Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley with the 2013 Servant of Justice Award. Guests then enjoyed a hilarious keynote address by author Dennis Lehane, who kept the crowd reeling as he recounted his upbringing in gritty Dorchester and his life growing up in a first-generation Irish family. He identified this hard-scrabble beginning as the basis for his descriptive writing style and the empathy he holds for the poor and down-trodden. The night was bookmarked by wonderful musical performances, great social networking, beautiful art on auction, and tasty treats.



From left, Attorney Julie A. Lynch; Attorney Nicole Norkevicius; Attorney Michelle Keith; Attorney Maja Bozic at the Equal Justice Celebration

Merrimack Valley-North Shore Legal Services Organizes Race for Justice

A great time was had by all at the 3rd Annual [Race for Justice](#) on Nov. 9. Runners, volunteers, staff, sponsors and spectators joined MVNS for a morning of fun and perfect fall weather at the Lowell Elks Lodge. The five-mile course took race participants through the peaceful Lowell Dracut Tyngsborough State Forest. At the awards ceremony following the race, the winners chose from a selection of prizes including farm-stand pies and donated gifts. The crowd stuck around for a trivia game in which participants vied for prizes. Race participants included local runners interested in a unique course and friends and supporters of MVNS. Visit the [Race for Justice 2013 event page on Facebook](#) to see photos from the day.

Boston Bar Association Hosts Annual Meeting

More than 1,400 lawyers, judges and business professionals joined BBA President Paul T. Dacier and Keynote Speaker Theodore Olson at the Boston Bar Association Annual Meeting Luncheon on Sept. 27. [Click here for photos of the event.](#)

Legal Aid Groups Host Anniversary Galas and Open House

Mass Law Reform Institute celebrated its 45th anniversary on Nov. 20. Hosted by the law firm of Holland & Knight in Boston, the festivities drew a packed room of friends, supporters and legal services colleagues and included a tribute and toast to late MLRI attorney Tony Winsor.

MetroWest Legal Services hosted its Pro Bono Recognition & Awards Reception honoring The Hon. Melvin S Hoffman, U.S. Bankruptcy Court, and The Hon. Angela M Ordonez, Chief Justice of the Probate & Family Court on Nov. 12 in Ashland.

Neighborhood Legal Services hosted an open house at their new Lawrence office on Nov. 21.

Prisoners' Legal Services hosted its 40th anniversary celebration on Nov. 21 at Bingham McCutchen in Boston, featuring Stephen Bright, President and Senior Counsel of the Southern Center for Human Rights.



From left, MLRI Executive Director Georgia Katsoulomitis, former Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court Margaret Marshall and former MLRI Executive Director Allan Rodgers at MLRI's 45th anniversary

Resources

New Website and Publication for MAC's Trauma and Learning Initiative

Massachusetts Advocates for Children's Trauma and Learning Initiative, a collaboration with Harvard Law School, announced the launch of a new website and resource guide in November. Visit <http://traumasensitiveschools.org/> to download a copy of the guide, "Helping Traumatized Children Learn, Volume 2: Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools."



Welcome from Trauma and Learning Initiative director Susan Cole

Hot off the Presses! Former MLRI Executive Director Allan G. Rodgers Publishes Book

Allan G. Rodgers, who served as executive director of the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute for 42 years prior to his retirement, has published a new book. *Rap-Ups of A Retired Reformer: Stories About How Legal Services Advocates Transformed Laws for Poor People in Massachusetts* is a great read that outlines the impressive impact of legal services on the lives of low income people. It can be downloaded for free in PDF form, or as an eBook for your Kindle, Android, or i-device at www.mlri.org.

Free Publications from National Consumer Law Center

Reports:

- [No Fresh Start: How States Allow Debt Collectors to Push Families into Poverty, October](#)

2013

- Helping Low-Income Utility Customers Manage Overdue Bills through Arrearage Management Programs (AMP), Sept. 2013 [PDF]

E-Alerts for Advocates

Want to receive short "hot topic" e-alerts for consumer advocates? Sign up [here](#). Topics include elder news and issues, consumer impact (NCLC's recent work on hot consumer issues), notification of upcoming webinars and higher education news.

Webinars on Consumer Issues

NCLC sponsors free webinars for advocates on a variety of consumer issues, including foreclosure defense and auto fraud, among others. Many webinars focus on current issues affecting older consumers. All webinars are archived and available for your listening pleasure. Access the archives and sign up to be notified of upcoming webinars [here](#).

Advocacy

CPR Launches Project to Advocate for Alternatives to Guardianship

The Center for Public Representation and Nonotuck Resource Associates hosted a planning forum on Oct. 29 to launch an innovative demonstration project advancing supported decision-making as an alternative to guardianship. Approximately 50 people, including national and international disability rights experts and five Massachusetts probate court judges, attended the day-long conference at the Delaney House in Holyoke. The one-year pilot project will enable individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities in Western Massachusetts to make decisions impacting their own lives through the supported decision-making model. Under this model, the individual designates a network of supporters such as peers, family members, friends and job coaches to help him or her make decisions. The process maximizes independence and promotes self-advocacy. Featured speakers included Michael Bach, executive vice-president of the Canadian Association for Community Living, and former New York Surrogate Judge Kristen Booth Glen. Judge Glen described a case about a pregnant woman with an intellectual disability whom she ultimately decided should not be under guardianship. Through the support of her partner, his sister, a neighbor and a homemaker agency, the woman successfully demonstrated she could take care of her baby and manage her home.

MLRI & Coalition of Advocates Prompt Improvements to House Welfare Reform Bill

Mass. Law Reform Institute, working with a coalition of advocates, succeeded in getting substantial improvements to the state House welfare bill passed on Nov. 6. MLRI's partners included Greater Boston Legal Services and other legal services programs, the National Association of Social Workers Mass. Chapter, Crittenton Women's Union, Neighbor to Neighbor and the Coalition for Social Justice. The final version of the House bill allows public and private education to apply to the welfare system's work requirement for two years instead of the current one year, allows applicants to receive benefits for 60 days instead of the current 30 before commencing their job search and relaxes a provision that past welfare recipients comply with a Department of Transitional Assistance plan while off benefits before reapplying. Despite these improvements, both the House and Senate bills would cause substantial harm to children and their families. Among other things, both bills would authorize the state administration to narrow the standard for disability so that 4,500 parents who have been determined disabled would become subject to work requirements and a two-year time limit, and would be at risk of losing lifeline benefits for themselves and their children. The coalition is continuing its work to address these issues before the bills become law.

GBLS Awarded "Community Partner of the Year" Award for Youth Advocacy

Greater Boston Legal Services was awarded a Community Partner of the Year award by Year Up due to its "outstanding leadership in this community, helping guide young men and women from Year Up to reach their full potential and succeed." GBLS was also touted for helping youth

"navigate the challenging systems they encounter, as they try to bring stability to their own lives, as well as the lives of their families." Year Up provides urban young adults with the skills, experience, and support to reach their potential through professional careers and higher education.

U.S. Department of Justice Awards SCCLS Grant to Help Domestic Violence Victims

South Coastal Counties Legal Services and five other victim service agencies received \$500,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice to create the Legal Intervention for Survivors of Abuse Project (Project LISA). Members include: SCCLS; Family & Community Resources; The Women's Center at SSTAR; Independence House; A Safe Place; and South Shore Women's Resource Center. Through Project LISA, at least 250 individual legal-outreach sessions for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and/or stalking will be undertaken annually. Depending on the nature of their case, clients will receive free counsel and advice, brief service or full-representation in a confidential and culturally sensitive manner that respects each survivor's individual choices. The funding will be awarded over a three-year period that began Oct. 1.

First Year of HomeCorps Project a Success

At the end of its first year of operation, the Massachusetts Legal Services HomeCorps project is living up to its promise to stand up for victims of the foreclosure crisis. Nineteen full-time legal services HomeCorps attorneys and two part-time family law attorneys from seven programs across the state have helped almost 1,000 Massachusetts families and individuals facing foreclosure or eviction after foreclosure. The results are impressive: Foreclosures and evictions have been delayed or prevented, deficiency judgments discharged, compensation won for former homeowners and tenants, relocation payments made, homes repurchased. HomeCorps has kept families together, kept elders in their lifelong homes, allowed children to stay in their schools and workers to hold on to their jobs and reduced community blight.

One example of the project's success is the case of the "Jones" family. The family knew they couldn't stay in their home because their mortgage had become unaffordable, and they had fallen behind. But they thought they had enough equity in the house to afford a mobile home in New Hampshire, so they lined one up and put their house on the market. Now, with foreclosure looming, they had an offer to buy, and just needed a little time to close the deal. The bank, however, refused to postpone and went ahead with the foreclosure. The Joneses contacted Attorney General Martha Coakley's office. Their case was analyzed and referred to Merrimack Valley Legal Services. MVLS attorney Jennifer Kurrus filed a restraining order on the bank on behalf of the Joneses, which convinced the bank to rescind the foreclosure sale and allow the Joneses to sell the house. She also negotiated to lower the fees included in the payoff. The Joneses sold the house and were delighted to resettle in their new mobile home in New Hampshire.

The legal services portion of HomeCorps is run in cooperation with attorneys at the Attorney General's office, who focus on helping distressed homeowners obtain loan modifications. MLAC congratulates the HomeCorps staff and thanks Attorney General Coakley for establishing the program.

MassLegalHelp.org seeks content submissions

MassLegalHelp.org is the statewide legal services website for the client community. Thousands of people use MassLegalHelp every month to get the information and self-help materials they need. Massachusetts Law Reform Institute is continually reviewing and expanding the content on MassLegalHelp to serve the client community better, and they need your help. Examples of recent contributions include:

- A new section on the Affidavit of Indigency by Meg MacDougal from Merrimack Valley North Shore Legal Services
- An updated and expanded Getting Paid by Lydia Edwards, Director of Legal Services Brazilian Immigrant Center
- An updated and expanded section for "What if I Am Facing Foreclosure?" for homeowners, by Mariah Jennings-Rampsi from South Coastal Counties Legal Services

Please email Caroline Robinson if you would like to contribute new content.

Tech Tip: To Pin or Not to Pin?

If there is a document you use frequently you can "Pin" it from the application so it will appear at the top of your "recent" lists in your Office 2010 applications. You can do same from the "Recent Places" section as well.

For example: from Word, select File > Open. There is a small pushpin beside the list of recent documents. Click the pushpin and the document will now appear at the top of the list.

To unpin, just click again.

To remove the pin, right click & select "Remove from List."

To remove all recent documents open, right mouse click and select "Clear Unpinned Documents."

The same applies to "Recent Places" which is on the right side of your document list in Word, Excel, PowerPoint. You can also Pin an application to your Windows 7 Taskbar. Right mouse click on an application and select "Pin to Taskbar."

-- Patricia Shaughnessy, Support and Training Specialist

Media Highlights

These are just some highlights for 2013. For a full list of media coverage, visit the [News](#) section of MLAC's Web site.

Boston Hides & Furs to pay nearly \$1m to workers (Boston Globe)

Greater Boston Legal Services assisted the Department of Labor in filing a wage violation suit on behalf of workers at a Chelsea animal hide processing plant.

More Woes for Jobless System (Boston Globe)

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute Attorney Margaret Monsell says the state is erroneously sending letters to jobless people to recoup past unemployment payments.

Economic uncertainty hurts legal aid program (Boston Globe)

The new president of Greater Boston Legal Services, Melissa Bayer Tearney, is profiled.

"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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