

Legal Aid Link

Summer 2008

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25th Anniversary Celebration



MLAC celebrated its 25th anniversary with a cocktail reception at the Marriott Copley Place in Boston on Tuesday, May 13.

Nearly 250 guests from the Massachusetts legal aid community, including program staff, board members, legislators, and members of the judiciary and the private bar attended the event. The highlights of the evening include:

Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall of the Supreme Judicial Court was the event's featured speaker, addressing the audience on the importance of civil legal aid in providing access to justice across the Commonwealth.

MLAC honored longtime community activist and MLAC board member **Ethel "Peggy" Santos** with a lifetime achievement award in honor of her decades of work in helping low-income people.

MLAC's executive director, **Lonnie A. Powers**, was honored for his 25 years of service by the executive directors of all Massachusetts legal aid programs.

[Click here](#) to view photos from the event.

[Click here](#) to view a timeline and PowerPoint slideshow of MLAC's history.

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Budget Update from EJC

For fiscal year 2009, MLAC requested a \$5 million increase for civil legal aid funding in the Commonwealth's budget line item 0321-1600.

Early in the budget process, MLAC, the Equal Justice Coalition and the staff and boards of legal aid programs throughout the state advocated zealously for this increase, citing

a perennial shortage of funding, continued overwhelming need and substantial economic benefit to the Commonwealth. Our combined efforts resulted in Governor Patrick recommending a \$2.4 million increase in funding for MLAC in his budget, which was released in January. Although this increase fell short of our request, it demonstrated that the Patrick Administration had been listening. In fact, this was the first time in recent memory that a Governor's budget had contained such a large increase for civil legal aid.

Things shifted between January and early May, which is when the House released its budget recommendations, as the Commonwealth's revenue picture worsened. Despite the economy, the House budget contained an increase of \$1.3 million for MLAC. We pressed on to the Senate and on May 22, the Senate released its budget recommendations which included a \$1.4 million increase to the MLAC line item.

The budget now sits with a Conference Committee (composed of both House and Senate members), whose job it is to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the budget. We will be working diligently to ensure that the Senate number (a \$1.4 million increase for the MLAC line item) is the number contained in the Conference budget.

For more information about the MLAC line item or the civil legal aid funding campaign, please visit the Equal Justice Coalition's website at www.equaljusticecoalition.org.

Diversity Coalition News

Building on the foundation of last fall's **Let's Get REAL About Diversity** training, the Diversity Coalition held a series of **Let's Get REAL About Disability** trainings throughout the Commonwealth during April and May.



About 230 Mass. legal services staff members participated across eight sites. Attendees learned the historical context for disability law, definitions of disability, how to use appropriate language in discussing disability issues, how to assist people with various disabilities, and more.

Overall, the attendees' feedback was positive. Many said they appreciated the opportunity to receive formal disability training and some expressed a need for more technical disability-related training in the future.

The Diversity Coalition plans to continue exploring the other primary dimensions of diversity (Gender, Race, Age, Ethnicity, and Sexuality) through additional workshops in the coming year. The next will take place in fall 2008. Stay tuned for more details!

Client Council News

Central/West Region Training Seminar

On April 30 the Client Council held a board training seminar on **Board Roles and Responsibilities** in Worcester. Client Council Steering Committee members Gloria Piner and David Pearson facilitated the seminar, which focused on how boards of directors function.



The seven participants from across the state learned how

boards establish priorities and agendas, and how they can best bring the needs of their communities to the table. One participant said, "I now have an understanding why I am on the board." The Client Council plans to hold the same seminar for client board members in other regions of the state.

The Buzz

Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS)

Ellen Shachter, senior attorney in GBLS' Cambridge and Somerville Office, was awarded the National Student Partnership (NSP) Community Partner of the Year award in February 2008. Ellen is on the local advisory board for the Somerville office of NSP and has provided its students with on-going training and technical support.

Ellen Wallace, senior attorney for the Employment Unit, received the Massachusetts AFL-CIO Merit Award in May 2008 "for her hard work and commitment to the Massachusetts labor movement."

Attorneys **Manisha Bhatt**, Family Law Unit; **Naomi Meyer**, Welfare Unit; and **Elizabeth Toulan**, Welfare Unit Family Economic Initiative, have been promoted to Senior Attorneys.

Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts (LACCM)

LACCM welcomes Development Director **Paul Fitzmeyer**, Bart Gordon Fellow **Nina Sá**, Benefits and Employment Staff Attorney **Jessica Albrecht**, and temporary Housing Unit Staff Attorney **Kristina Petronko**. Paul will coordinate development work for LACCM, Western Massachusetts Legal Services, and Massachusetts Justice Project. He most recently served as Director of Development for the Carson Center for Human Services. Nina, a graduate of Roger Williams University School of Law, speaks Portuguese and Spanish and will primarily focus on immigration law and outreach to underserved communities in southern Worcester County. Jessica is a graduate of Northeastern University School of Law and has had internships with Greater Boston Legal Services and Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. Kristina, a graduate of Boston University School of Law, has interned at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, the National Women's Law Center and the American Civil Liberties Union.

LACCM Staff Attorney **Andrea Park** won an innovative motion to dismiss in a housing eviction case, arguing that the foreclosing bank had no standing to bring an eviction case because at the time the case was started, the bank had not executed or recorded a deed showing that it owned the building. The judge agreed with the analysis and dismissed the eviction case, holding that the bank was neither the owner of record nor a landlord entitled to bring an eviction case. This decision, which relied heavily on parts of Andrea's brief, is an important development in legal services' ongoing response to the state's foreclosure crisis.

Andrea also successfully advocated for a child whose mother was murdered and whose landlord wouldn't allow her to continue living in the apartment with an adult caretaker. Andrea argued that since the child was on the lease, she had a right to stay in the apartment, and because she was a minor, her father should be allowed to move in to care for her. The landlord's initial position was that the father and child would have to

reapply for housing and wait on a long list for an available unit. Andrea filed a complaint and won an injunction that allowed the father and child to live in the apartment while the case continued. Before the summary judgment date, the landlord relented and allowed the father to sign on to the lease for the original apartment that the child and mother had shared.

LACCM Executive Director **Jonathan Mannina** has been appointed to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination Advisory Board by Governor Deval Patrick.

On June 25, LACCM, the Massachusetts Justice Project and the Worcester County Bar Association will host the **Equal Justice Reception** at Tuckerman Hall in Worcester. The event honors attorneys and advocates who provide pro bono legal assistance to low-income and elderly residents of Worcester County. The keynote speaker will be **Honorable Nancy Gertner, United States District Court Judge**. The reception will begin at 5:45 P.M. with a cocktail hour, and the speaking program will commence at 6:30 P.M. If you would like an invitation or more information, contact **Sarah Loy** at (508) 425-2808 or sloy@laccm.org.

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI)

Virginia Benzan joins MLRI as its newest immigration attorney. Virginia graduated from Northeastern Law School in 2003 and since then has been in private practice in Boston, mostly handling criminal and immigration cases. Before law school, she was a congressional aide for Rep. Ed Markey for three years.

Merrimack Valley - North Shore Legal Services (MVNS)

Kanha Hak joins MVNS as the new director of the Cambodian Outreach Project. She was previously a Lowell Outreach Coordinator at the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence.

MVNS bids goodbye to Americorp Volunteer **Katie Bryson** and longtime Cambodian Outreach Project Director **Samnang Mam** who will be returning to Cambodia to work for a law firm in Phnom Penh.

This Side of the Truth, starring **Ricky Gervais, Rob Lowe** and **Jennifer Garner**, was filming at the building next to MVNS throughout May, making it a very exciting month at MVNS. Look for it in theaters early next year!

Western Massachusetts Legal Services

WMLS is pleased to welcome two new family law attorneys: **Jessica Woodman-Hardy** will work in the Northampton Office (Franklin and Hampshire Counties) and **Margery Kennard** will work in the Springfield Office (Hampden County).

WMLS also welcomes **Paul Fitzmeyer**, the new Central/Western Region director of development. Paul's office will be primarily located in the WMLS Springfield Office, but he will be spending time at MJP and LACCM.

New MLAC Board Member



MLAC is proud to announce that the Supreme Judicial Court has appointed **Jacqueline E. Farrow** to the MLAC board of directors. Jackie is also a client board member on the board of directors of Western Massachusetts Legal Services (WMLS). Since 2002 she has been working at the Stavros Center for Independent Living as an assistant to the RN team. Jackie will fill the client board member position left by Peggy Santos whose final board term ended in March.

MLAC Staff Updates

Welcoming Wayne Welch

Wayne is the new Network Administrator on the Central Technology Project team. He has nine years of experience in network design and infrastructure and help desk and customer support. He will focus on maintaining and upgrading the current network infrastructure used by legal aid programs and will be implementing new hardware and software.

Farewell to Thanos Matthai

Thanos Matthai's last day with MLAC was June 2. He served as Communications Assistant for the past year, wowing us with his dedication, skill, and overall good nature. We will all miss him greatly. He is heading off to Boston University law school in the fall, so hopefully we'll be able to keep him in the Mass legal services family. We currently are interviewing for a new Communications Assistant.

Important Dates

The following are dates and locations for upcoming MLAC board meetings:

June 26 - [Massachusetts Bar Association](#)

July 24 - Massachusetts Bar Association

September 25 - Massachusetts Bar Association