

Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

FY17 Civil Legal Aid Yields Economic Benefits to the Commonwealth

Valuation of the access-to-justice work of Massachusetts civil legal aid programs typically focuses on non-economic benefits such as the social benefits of homelessness prevention, access to education, protection from domestic violence and child abuse, access to nutrition and healthcare, and much more. Frequently lost in the discussion are the many economic benefits that flow to the Commonwealth by virtue of this work.

Each year legal aid programs funded through the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) substantially boost the Commonwealth's economy by: bringing in millions of federal dollars; improving the economic conditions of low-income residents,¹ and; saving the state millions in avoided public benefits, emergency shelter, and social service costs.

An examination of just some of the FY17 economic benefits attained by MLAC-funded legal aid programs reveals over \$59 million in economic benefits to the Commonwealth.

Federal Revenue Coming into the Commonwealth	
Disability Benefits Project: One year new federal SSI/SSDI benefits and back payments to clients	\$5,726,768 ²
Disability Benefits Project: Direct federal reimbursement to DTA for EAEDC payments	\$213,277
Disability Benefits Project: Federal payments to legal aid for representation of DBP clients	\$299,486
SNAP Benefits: Preservation of federal nutrition assistance benefits	\$10,301,353
Medicare: Federal health care coverage won	\$593,456
Federal Taxes: Credits and refunds from representing clients with tax controversies	\$558,440
Total New Federal Revenue	\$17,692,780

Benefits Won for Low-Income Residents	
Unemployment Insurance: benefits won on appeal	\$2,064,256
Child Support: Child support orders obtained	\$1,470,976 ³
Financial Judgments for Tenants	\$2,359,346
Foreclosure: Compensation and debt relief	\$5,180,604
Utilities: Exempting low-income consumers from rate increases	\$7,000,000
Wages Won or Protected	\$2,930,000
Reimbursement for Medical Debt	\$11,080
Debts Discharged in Bankruptcy	\$3,311,770
Total Benefits and Savings for Residents	\$24,328,032

Savings for the Commonwealth	
Foster Care Avoided for Unaccompanied Minors: savings through obtaining custody orders	\$2,033,150
Homelessness Prevention: avoided costs for shelter and health care for homeless	\$13,466,507
Domestic Violence Prevention: avoided health care costs only	\$1,700,721
Total Estimated Savings	\$17,200,378

Total Benefits and Savings to the Commonwealth in FY17	\$59,221,190
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¹ Nearly all economic benefits won for clients in the form of cash are spent locally and in their entirety.

² Includes back payments and only the first year of benefits. Clients whose cases were won by MLAC's Disability Benefits Project in FY17 can be expected to receive a combined **\$25.4 million in SSI/SSDI benefits over their lifetimes.**

³ Includes only the first year of child support. Over the long term (estimated here to be 9 years), these orders could bring clients an estimated **\$13.2 million in payments.**