



# Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

**Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation**  
**Executive Director**  
**Boston, MA**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), a statewide, quasi-public organization that provides leadership and support for civil legal services to low-income individuals and families, in partnership with the broader civil legal services community in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, seeks nominations and applications for its next Executive Director.

Since its creation by statute<sup>1</sup> in 1983, MLAC has been working to address the causes and to ameliorate the effects, of poverty by pursuing equal justice for low-income people. To achieve this goal, MLAC works to strengthen the network of Massachusetts regional and statewide legal aid programs, supporting them as they deliver high-quality, strategically focused legal assistance that helps clients transform their lives and communities.

This is an exciting opportunity to be at the forefront of one of the strongest legal aid systems in the country and to help shape the direction of civil legal services provided to vulnerable and marginalized communities throughout Massachusetts. As the largest funder of civil legal services in the Commonwealth, MLAC, in conjunction with its grantees, has long been a leading proponent of civil legal aid. MLAC's influence has increased over time, as more governmental agencies and foundations have partnered with MLAC and its grantees to meet burgeoning civil legal aid needs.

Reporting to an 11-member Board of Directors appointed by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, the Executive Director will lead the organization in its mission to provide funding and strategic support of civil legal services through its grantees and other partners across the Commonwealth. The Executive Director represents MLAC publicly and will continue to elevate the organization's image as a critical, impacting agency within the community. As MLAC moves into the next phase of its evolution, there is an enormous opportunity to become the leading voice for civil legal services in the Commonwealth. In close collaboration with grantees and other partners, MLAC can increase public understanding of the critical role civil legal aid plays in ensuring just, fair and equitable communities.

The Executive Director will be an inclusive, adaptive leader with a breadth and depth of public interest legal experience across a range of issues. The Executive Director will uphold a culture of collaboration and transparency to ensure operations consistently support exceptional quality services, which in turn meet the civil legal needs of low-income people, empower them to transform their lives and assure equal access to opportunities and justice with an appreciation for the barriers low-income people face.

The search committee is being assisted by Tamar Datan and Nureen Das of the Nonprofit Professionals Advisory Group. Please see application instructions at the end of this document.

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<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 221A. The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation Act.



## HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

MLAC was established by the Commonwealth to ensure that low-income people with critical non-criminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice and representation.

MLAC is the largest funding source for civil legal aid programs in Massachusetts. With funding from the Commonwealth and the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts, as well as other government and private funds, MLAC currently provides general support grants to 14 local and statewide civil legal aid programs, as well as operational training and support to the Massachusetts legal aid community. More recently, MLAC has been appointed fiscal agent for a \$1 million public/private foundation grant, the Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund, and has received a major Victim of Crime Act grant from the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance to ensure legal services are provided to victims of crime with civil legal issues. Opportunities exist to expand this type of additional funding in the future.

MLAC is committed to ensuring provision of high-quality, strategically focused civil legal assistance that empowers clients to transform their lives and communities. In doing so, MLAC supports cultural and linguistic competence, as well as diversity, equity and inclusion across the organization and MLAC-funded programs so that clients can be best served.

## PROGRAM INITIATIVES HIGHLIGHTS

MLAC awards general support grants; grants for special projects in domestic violence, disability benefits, and Medicare advocacy; and special time-limited grants such as that from the Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund.

The majority of MLAC's resources are provided through state allocations and from Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) disbursements. The bulk of these funds are, in turn, granted to more than a dozen organizations that provide client education, representation and advocacy to people unable to afford civil legal assistance.

In addition to supporting regional and statewide civil legal aid agencies, MLAC supports a variety of program initiatives designed to strengthen the civil legal aid sector across the Commonwealth. These initiatives include:

- The Central Technology Project – an initiative that seeks to standardize technology for MLAC- and LSC<sup>2</sup>-funded legal aid programs in Massachusetts, helping program staff deliver legal services to low-income clients effectively and efficiently.
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – on-going work to create a representative, welcoming and collaborative environment within legal services in order to provide accessible, culturally competent services to clients of all backgrounds and their communities, and to help programs to be equitable in hiring and create inclusive work environments.
- The Equal Justice Coalition - a collaboration created by the Massachusetts Bar Association, Boston Bar Association and the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation ensuring that low-income people in Massachusetts have access to legal assistance when they have a civil legal problem. The Coalition includes representatives from bar associations across the Commonwealth, law firms and legal services programs who together work to protect and increase the state appropriation for civil legal aid through education and advocacy.

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<sup>2</sup> Legal Services Corporation is an independent nonprofit established and funded by Congress to provide financial support for civil legal aid for the poor.



- Massachusetts Legal Services websites, developed and maintained by the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, one for the general public (masslegalhelp.org) and one for legal services advocates (masslegalservices.org)
- Fellowships - Fellowships are offered for Language Access and Racial Justice work, as well as the Bart Gordon Fellowship for new attorneys who spend up to two years practicing law in communities which are underserved.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Recognizing the increasingly complex demands of the sector and the need to balance external demands with a strategic growth plan, focus on sustainability, and investment in internal capacity to support growth of services, this Executive Director transition is an exciting opportunity for a seasoned and innovative professional to lead an established organization through a period of changing demographic and funding realities.

The incoming Executive Director will be responsible for leading and managing all aspects of the organization, and, in conjunction with the Board of Directors, for all strategic and capital-related obligations. To ensure operational effectiveness, the Executive Director will model and lead effective communication and collaboration across the organization and its key partners. The new Executive Director will oversee a staff of 15 professionals and contracted consultants as needed.

The Executive Director will inspire and guide MLAC staff, board, grantees, community partners and other interested stakeholders in working together to achieve the following goals over the next three years:

- Maximize funding and other resources;
- Heighten education and publicity about civil legal aid, including through creating, in partnership with others, a system-wide brand and storyline for civil legal aid;
- Enhance and expand, in collaboration with MLAC-funded civil legal aid programs, coordination, collaboration, discourse and innovation with the social service and anti-poverty community;
- Ensure that client voices are heard/incorporated at all levels, especially in decision making;
- Model culturally competent leadership and strengthen the commitment to hiring, recruiting and retaining a diverse staff. Continue to build and support work environments that are inclusive and equitable.
- Enhance effectiveness, efficiency and coordination of the civil legal aid system;
- Develop evaluation and assessment tools to ensure progress toward the MLAC vision and toward achieving MLAC's strategic goals.



## KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### Vision and Leadership

Working with the Board of Directors, the Executive Director will set a vision for organizational development and oversee systems, structures, and internal policies to support the highest level of quality and effectiveness. The Executive Director will review current organizational needs and opportunities and help determine the direction and model for development, focusing on financial sustainability. The Executive Director will actively identify areas for operational improvement and identify best practices to guide grantees in setting goals for high-quality service and professional standards, among other performance standards. The Executive Director will enable the monitoring of these goals, ensuring that the internal capacity, systems, and policies are strong and directed at supporting clients.

### Finance and Administration

The Executive Director will oversee a budget of approximately \$25M and will maintain the organization's commitment to financial stability through sound fiscal controls and leadership. Working with the Finance Committee, Fiscal Director and Manager, the Executive Director will create an annual budget, monitor revenue and expenses, and identify ways to broaden revenue streams. The Executive Director will also ensure smooth functioning and high-quality work at all levels of the organization, including program monitoring, data collection, communications, diversity equity and inclusion, and technology. Working with senior staff, the Executive Director will oversee all regulatory reporting, contractual obligations and donor restrictions, and will maintain appropriate internal policies and procedures to ensure compliance to enhance quality of services to the clients.

### Collaboration and Communication Across the Civil Legal Aid Community

The Executive Director will identify and help to build systems to ensure coordination, collaboration, and effective communication between and among MLAC staff, MLAC-funded programs, and with the broader Access to Justice community, and will develop MLAC as the leading voice for civil legal aid in the Commonwealth. The Executive Director will promote, facilitate, and document strategic conversations across program areas aimed at strengthening information sharing, organizational learning, and continuous improvement. The Executive Director will also lead the development and implementation of structural as well as technological improvements for the agency to ensure best practices are communicated and institutionally supported.

### Community Relations and External Partnerships

As chief spokesperson, the Executive Director will be expected to develop, nurture and expand mutually beneficial relationships across a variety of constituencies that provide long-term benefits for the organization, the civil legal aid community and its clients. Specifically, the Executive Director will develop opportunities to expand MLAC's profile through broad and diverse engagement with professional associations, advocacy organizations, the state legislature, the Access to Justice community, prospective partners, corporate and nonprofit partners, public officials, policymakers, the media and the public-at-large. S/he will negotiate partnerships and contractual relationships and ensure compliance with funder and partner agreements. The Executive Director will serve as a compelling spokesperson, promoting the



agency's mission, programs and services, and ensuring that MLAC is consistently presented in a strong, positive way to key stakeholders and the public.

### Diversity Equity and Inclusion

MLAC has a longstanding commitment to diversity equity and inclusion. One highlight is the statewide Diversity Equity and Inclusion Council which is facilitated by MLAC's Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). The charge for the Council includes organizing initiatives at the program level, establishing and sharing best-practice standards, setting and facilitating annual program specific and/or statewide diversity goals and providing educational resources through consultations and statewide trainings. The new Executive Director will be a culturally competent, visionary leader who will enhance the work of the Council as well as engage deeply with the DEI Director on recruitment, hiring and retention, implicit-bias trainings, and race equity work.

### Guide MLAC Through a Time of Tremendous Change and Growth

The Executive Director will exemplify and nurture a diverse, inclusive and equitable culture that first and foremost values and supports the programs in ensuring excellence in meeting the civil legal needs of clients. The Executive Director must embrace teamwork, communication, collaboration, accountability, transparency, and integrity at every level, and will employ best practices related to technology and infrastructure to ensure the agency is responding to the needs of clients and with the broader environment. The Executive Director will also take advantage of opportunities to identify efficiencies and streamline procedures, which includes an assessment of communication structure to leverage multi-media outreach for marketing and public relations.

## **QUALIFICATIONS AND ATTRIBUTES OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE**

The successful candidate will be an innovative, seasoned, and agile leader who possesses both the vision to inspire and the skills to lead an organization into a new phase of development. With a demonstrated commitment to MLAC's mission and expertise in civil legal services delivery, the new Executive Director will be a confident, transparent, collaborative and accessible leader. Moreover, the Executive Director will demonstrate the ability to protect, secure and expand funding, while operating with integrity and sound judgment.

*While no one person will embody all the qualities enumerated below, the ideal candidate will possess many of the following professional and personal abilities, attributes and experiences:*

- Ten years' experience in public interest law, or related field, preferred; candidates who are attorneys and/or candidates with a strong history of working with attorneys, paralegals and other legal advocates are encouraged to apply;
- Experience in legal aid program management or relevant non-profit management experience highly desired, including supervising, evaluating and inspiring staff, with a demonstrated commitment to economic and social justice;
- Demonstrated leadership in a complex, dynamic organization including fiscal oversight and budget development experience, revenue development, and fundraising experience; the ability to lead



complex organizations through periods of growth and change, requiring creative and innovative solutions to complex challenges;

- Demonstrated success internally and externally as a consensus builder and collaborator, identifying and cultivating partnerships, awareness, and support for the work;
- Demonstrated competence with, and commitment to, the use of technology in the operation of legal aid offices and the delivery of legal aid to the poor.
- Outstanding oral and written communication skills, and a proclivity to listen closely to and with empathy for those with different perspectives and experiences;
- Ability to act as chief spokesperson for MLAC, to represent MLAC to a variety of stakeholders and intermediaries in a credible and influential way, and with a selfless manner, focusing on values and the greater good and mission of the organization combined with a nuanced and sensitive understanding of the culture and specific challenges faced by underserved populations;
- A strategic, collaborative and comprehensive approach to planning and decision making; ability to recognize and capitalize on growth opportunities while staying mission-aligned, and experience leveraging contacts and partner relationships towards impact;
- A commitment to maintaining and growing support from current funders and cultivating new donors, and a history of successfully taking organizations to the next level of sustained philanthropic support;
- A demonstrated understanding of sound board governance, gained from direct experience working with professional boards or through active board involvement; ability and enthusiasm to involve the Board and other community leaders in recruitment of new members;
- Political savvy and an enterprising spirit to build coalitions and nurture current partnerships and alliances while identifying and establishing new strategic collaborations;
- Demonstrated ability to create and foster partnerships between individuals, governmental entities and organizations, corporations and foundations, both locally and statewide, and willingness to develop MLAC as the leading voice of civil legal aid in Massachusetts; a collaborative, consensus-building style with the humility to forgo ego in the service of mission;
- Culturally competent leader who has a demonstrated track record of enhancing diversity, inclusion and equity at every level of a complex organization;
- An optimistic outlook and the humor, integrity, patience, and perseverance necessary to advance efforts to ensure underserved populations have greater access to services; and
- A law degree and Massachusetts Bar admission, or the ability to motion into the bar soon after being hired, is highly desired.



## TO APPLY

More information about MLAC can be found at: <http://mlac.org/>

Candidates are strongly encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Applications including a cover letter describing your interest and qualifications, your resume (in Word format) and where you learned of the position should be submitted to: [mlac-ed@nonprofitprofessionals.com](mailto:mlac-ed@nonprofitprofessionals.com)

*MLAC is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer and committed to diversity in its workforce. A crucial part of MLAC's vision is supporting cultural and linguistic competence, as well as ensuring diversity of staff and volunteers, so clients can be best served. Women, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, people of color, and persons who speak English as a second language are encouraged to apply. Reasonable accommodation in the application process will be provided upon request.*

*Nonprofit Professionals Advisory Group is an executive search and consulting firm dedicated to serving the mission-driven community. We partner with global mission-driven clients to deliver highly-tailored, innovative, and strategic senior- and executive-level search services. [www.nonprofitprofessionals.com](http://www.nonprofitprofessionals.com)*