

THE UNBEATABLE ADVOCATE

The Massachusetts legal services client newsletter

Spring/Summer 2012

Sixth Edition

Greater Boston Legal Services Annual Client/Staff Lobby Day

On January 24, 2012 more than 90 GBLS clients, past and present, family members, client board members, community organizations and other legal services supporters participated in this year's Client/Staff Lobby Day event at the state House.

GBLS Client/Staff Lobby Day is an annual event that provides clients, staff, client board members and other community participants the chance to speak directly to their legislators and tell them their stories and why funding for legal services must be maintained. This event gives clients the opportunity to meet their legislators in person and ask for support for Civil Legal Aid funding. Civil Legal Aid is listed in the state budget under the line item for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation.

Prior budget cuts have caused dramatic cuts in staff and legal services. Every legal aid organization in Massachusetts that is supported by MLAC has done the same. GBLS is the major legal aid provider in the Commonwealth. Cuts in services were necessary in order for GBLS to continue to provide quality legal services to hundreds of low-income people in the Boston area. The recipients of these services, community organizations and their supporters at this year's event requested a \$5 million dollar increase over last year's appropriation in order that these critical legal services can be restored and future services can be provided.

The bottom line is that this year's event resulted in the Senate Ways & Means Committee including in the budget \$11 million for the MLAC line item, \$1 million less than the House of Representatives approved budget line item for MLAC. The Senate then passed an amendment raising the amount to \$11.5 million, \$1 million more than this year's appropriation but still \$3 million less than is needed to help the thousands of low-income people in Massachusetts and stop the drastic cuts being made to

"Our mission is to educate and inform the Massachusetts legal services community"

In this issue...

Get the latest on MBTA fare increases, meet your new NLADA representative, read about the Domestic Workers' Conference

...and more!

Submissions welcome! See page 4 for info.



Louis Sepulveda, a native of Puerto Rico and now a resident of Dorchester, Mass., at the lobby day. For more photos, see page 2.

legal services. A conference committee will decide on the final amount, the House's \$12 million or the Senate's \$11.5 million.

– As reported to the "Unbeatable Advocate" by Linda Lank, Communications Director and Fundraising Coordinator for GBLS.

GBLS Client lobby day photos by Judy Meredith



Lizbeth Ginsberg (left) and Shelley Harter of Greater Boston Legal Services



Linda Lank (left) of GBLS gives suggestions to clients about what to say to their legislators.



Guest speaker Rep. Byron Rushing and Jacqui Bowman, executive director of Greater Boston Legal Services



Clients and other community participants urged the legislature to support legal aid funding.

Meet Your New National Legal Aid & Defender Association Representative!

Catherine Harris has been elected to serve as the representative of Regions 1 and 2 on the NLADA Civil Policy Group.

Ms. Harris has served on the board of directors at GBLs since 1991. She is an ardent advocate for children and a tireless defender of grandparents and the extended family life. Catherine is a member of Parent Partners, an advocate group for parents involved with the Department of Children and Families, and the National Alliance for Mental Illness. Ms. Harris also serves on the advisory board of the Family and Children Initiative.



The Importance of Client Participation

BY M. CEPEDA

So I'm on the board. Now what?

Becoming a director on any board is a great commitment, and being on the board of directors of a legal services program is not only a commitment but also a huge responsibility. Responsibilities which are not always clear to incoming members.

You may have been on other boards and be familiar with the basics or this may be your first experience. Whatever the situation, participate! You have something to contribute.

Get to know your program, ask questions, know your board, learn the by-laws, ask more questions, participate in meetings, read agendas and minutes, ask questions and get involved.

In the beginning you may feel shy, apprehensive,

intimidated, uncomfortable and even lost. But remember, it's just a new experience and setting. These feelings will pass as you become familiar with your program and board. Don't forget others have felt the same.

You are important to your program and your opinion counts. You may not have a J.D. (law degree) after your name, but you have very valuable L.E. (Life Experience). You bring knowledge and experience only acquired through living.

This has been a short introduction in a series of articles dedicated to board participation. The Unbeatable Advocate invites you to send comments, share experiences, ask questions and send suggestions for this and future topics.

What's Up Charlie! (MBTA Fares Increase)

BY ROBBIE ADJEI

Have you heard the story about Charlie and his ride on the MBTA? The story tells how Charlie boarded an MBTA train and discovered that there had been an increase to the fare. He didn't have the extra money to pay and never returned from his ride on the MBTA. Currently thousands of Massachusetts seniors and disadvantaged transit riders are facing a similar dilemma, but instead of not having the extra money to get off the T some riders won't have the extra money to ride the T on July 1, 2012 when the MBTA fare increases take effect. The T Riders Union (TRU) a program of the environmental justice membership organization Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE) located in the Dudley Square Roxbury neighborhood of Boston has been campaigning since January to stop the MBTA from raising fares and cutting services. On March 27th, supported by the National Lawyers Guild, five TRU members (the Fast Five) dressed as superheroes and laid siege to the MBTA Board Finance Committee meeting on behalf of Massachusetts seniors and low-income communities. The Fast Five demanded an immediate rejection by the Board of the MBTA's proposal to raise fares and cut services.

On April 4 the MBTA Board of Directors voted to increase fares by 23 percent. Due to persistent campaigning by TRU and other minority and low-income community organizations, Richard A. Davey, secretary and CEO of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and Jonathan Davis, acting general manager of the MBTA in an open letter to MBTA customers explained how the fare increase would impact MBTA fares and services.

The letter stated, "For Charlie Card users, the subway will now cost \$2 per ride, local bus service will cost \$1.50, students and seniors will each pay \$.75 for a bus trip and \$1 for a subway ride ... For RIDE trips required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, the fare will be \$4. For non-ADA required trips, the new premium fare will be \$5 per trip. Commuter rail single trip and monthly passes would be increased an average of 29 percent ... Ferry prices will be increased an average of 35 percent."



Rose Mattias of the T Riders Union protests MBTA fare increases.

The MBTA claims in its letter to customers that this year's cuts in no way balance their books and that this year's fare increases are a drop in the bucket compared to the money needed to cover the MBTA's funding issues. Also the letter says that in addition to this year's 23 percent increase the MBTA is proposing \$15.4 million in service changes for next year (2013). Included in the proposal for next year is the elimination of four weekday bus routes and modification to 14 others.

Under the proposal for 2013 "certain bus lines

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Something to Share?

Then send it in for the next *Unbeatable Advocate!*

All photos, submissions, comments, and news tips can be sent to:

advocate@mlac.org

The next *Unbeatable Advocate* will be due out in January 2013. All submissions must be received by December 15.

MBTA

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would run less frequently and others would see their routes altered." The MBTA also says in its letter that the 2013 proposal would cut services on the commuter rail. The Greenbush and Kingston/Plymouth lines' weekend services will be eliminated along with Needham line service on Saturdays. Most ferry services will not be reduced but instead be provided at a higher cost to customers, but the low-ridership Quincy ferry service on weekends will be eliminated.

The MBTA's letter to its customers was intended as an olive branch. However the 6,000 Massachusetts citizens who over the last four months have packed public meetings and the thousands who wrote to the T via email or letter must have disagreed. Because on April 24 the T Riders Union (TRU) and Massachusetts Senior Action Council protested the fare increases inside the Massachusetts House during the budget session.

According to the State House News Service "The protest, involving about 200 seniors, transit rider advocates and their supporters, occurred as lawmakers milled about the chamber waiting to begin afternoon deliberations on transportation amendments to the \$32.3 billion state budget proposal." Also reported was

that John Robinson, a Somerville resident and member of Senior Action Council, said "It's an emergency situation for people with disabilities and seniors because they're facing fare hikes that could endanger their living situation." Robinson said seniors and disabled residents might be forced to choose between paying for rides to work or their medical appointments and putting food on their table.

Lee Matsueda, T Riders Union (TRU) Program Director, stated "Our struggle continues and the fight is not over. There's still time to [demonstrate] to Governor Patrick, Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo and our state legislators to stop disproportionate fare increases on youth, senior and disabled riders now and make sure that funding for public transportation is a priority!"

The T Riders Union organizes T riders to demand their rights to a fair, affordable, reliable, safe and accountable public transit system that treats its riders with respect. For more information, visit www.ace-ej.org/tru, the TRU Facebook page www.facebook.com/tridersunion, or @AceEJ, or email tridersunion@ace-ej.org.

Legal Aid Loses a Champion

John Brooks, 98, an attorney and champion of legal aid, died on April 15. Here is a statement from Lonnie Powers, executive director of MLAC:

"His 98 and a half years were filled with the joy of life and a dedication to others. For those who didn't know him, he was a long-time leader in both the Massachusetts and national legal aid communities. Among other contributions, he was a long-term member of the Boston Legal Aid Society (BLAS) Board of Directors and helped lead the merger of BLAS and the Boston Legal Aid Program, which led to the creation of Greater

Boston Legal Services. He also served as president of the Boston Bar Association and the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, member of the Board of Directors of the Legal Services Corporation, and as one of the longest serving members of the Board of the National Consumer Law Center. Furthermore, he and his much-beloved late wife were among the founders of the Legal Advocacy and Resource Center. John will also always be remembered for his quiet intelligence, political skills, good humor and gentle kindness."

Women and Workers Stand for Justice

BY M. CEPEDA

In March, the Fifth Annual Women in Solidarity Conference was held at the Massachusetts State House. More than 300 extraordinary immigrant women and allies gathered to share experiences, empower each other and build a unified agenda around women's rights.

This year's panelists included women from the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Haiti, Mexico, and Honduras, who presented on issues of immigration justice, access to health care for immigrant families, international workers' rights, economic development for women in the U.S., and domestic violence.

Panelist Crusita Martinez, a domestic violence survivor, shared how after suffering physical abuse for months she had left her boyfriend only to suffer severe burns and disfiguration when he threw acid on her.

While Ms. Martinez was giving her testimony, Republicans in Congress were busy rejecting the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which would provide support to domestic abuse survivors and give prosecutors resources to convict violent abusers. VAWA could have helped Ms. Martinez and many domestic abuse survivors.

From May 18 to 21, the Fifth Annual Domestic Workers Conference was held in Washington, D.C.

Women from around the nation gathered to network, share experiences and empower each other, as they continue building a unified agenda and to celebrate accomplishments.

Conference offerings included trainings on leadership development, public speaking, peaceful demonstration, problem solving, and information gathering among other relevant topics. Several of the conference members attended a session of Congress where they spoke on issues of Health Care, Housing, and better wages.

We need your help!

Dear Readers:

The Unbeatable Advocate was founded by client board members, who are advocates for social justice for the communities they represent as members of the boards of directors of the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation and all legal aid programs funded by MLAC or the Legal Services Corporation.

The Unbeatable Advocate's purpose is to inform and educate client board members and their supporters about what is taking place within the legal service community. In order to continue to successfully meet our goal, we are asking for your help. The Unbeatable Advocate needs you to submit stories and other information such as events, award presentations, etc., concerning your board, agencies, or your community. Please submit information to: advocate@mlac.org

Sincerely,
The Unbeatable Advocate/Editorial
Committee

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Sixth edition

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