2011
ANNUAL REPORT

A young client of Greater Boston Legal Services (R) poses with her niece.
A letter from our Chair and our Executive Director

The past year has been strenuous on us all, but it also has provided exciting opportunities for renewal in the year ahead.

Flooding, tornadoes, an earthquake, and continuing economic dislocation have made for a challenging year for low-income people in the Commonwealth and for the legal aid programs that serve them. The year also saw organizational changes in two regional programs and leadership transitions in the largest local and statewide programs. Despite having lost 31% of the attorneys from legal aid programs since July 2008, the dedication and commitment of legal aid staff, the courage of our clients, the broad and deep support of the bar, and public funding through the Commonwealth provide the solid foundation for our work.

The funding crisis precipitated by the crash in income from the Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program and the lingering effects of the recession have greatly reduced the ability of legal aid programs to meet the growing needs of eligible people. And the numbers of eligible people continue to climb. The latest Census figures show an 11% increase of people in Massachusetts with incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level (the basic eligibility level for legal aid) over the last year — 94,000 more children, elders, and out-of-work or underemployed men and women trying to survive on the equivalent of $28,000 per year for a family of four.

As always with great challenges, opportunities abound. Although two veteran leaders of legal aid retired during the past year, their successors are carrying their programs forward. Allan Rodgers retired in December 2010 after 42 years as executive director of the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI), and Bob Sable retired at the end of July 2011 after a 43-year career in legal aid, the last 20 as executive director of Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS). Both left outstanding legacies of leadership and commitment to the cause of equal justice, and both of their successors, Georgia Katsoulomitis at MLRI and Jacquelynne Bowman at GBLS, are skilled, experienced and dedicated leaders. MLAC itself welcomed new leadership as Rahsaan Hall of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights became chair of the board of directors in May 2011.

MLAC continues to seek ways to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the programs we fund. During 2011, we supported and encouraged organizational changes in the southeast and central/west regions of Massachusetts that are already producing benefits for clients. (Additional details about these changes can be found on page 2.) We deeply appreciate the leadership of the boards of directors, executive directors and staff of South Coastal Counties Legal Services, the New Center for Legal Advocacy, Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts, and Western Massachusetts Legal Services that made these successful transitions possible. We anticipate that further organizational changes in FY12 in these and other regions will, like the changes during the last year, enhance the program operations and result in improved client services.

Last year also saw the creation of a new funding source: income from a voluntary increase in the annual registration fees paid by attorneys in Massachusetts to the Board of Bar Overseers. MLAC and the Boston and Massachusetts Bar Associations supported a successful petition by the Access to Justice Commission to the Supreme Judicial Court that led the Court to establish the program. The success of this effort is but one example of the central leadership role being played by the Commission which MLAC has supported since its inception.

Recognizing that the funding crisis continues despite some new income, we look forward in the new year to a renewed commitment to working in partnership with the bar, the programs, and all supporters of legal aid in expanding funding from the Commonwealth and other sources to begin to rebuild the ability to more adequately meet the legal needs of those for whom legal aid is the last resort. Ensuring “justice for all” to strengthen the bonds among us that make democracy possible and build a more vibrant economy for everyone: that is our goal.
The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation is the largest funding source for civil legal aid programs in Massachusetts. It was established by the State Legislature in 1983 to ensure that low-income people with critical non-criminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice and representation. With funding from the Commonwealth, the Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program, and the Board of Bar Overseers dues add-on program, MLAC provides grants to 16 local and statewide civil legal aid programs, as well as operational training and support to the Massachusetts legal aid community.

Our Mission

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FISCAL YEAR 2011 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- MLAC-funded programs employed 190 attorneys and 48 paralegals (full-time equivalents).
- MLAC-funded programs closed 28,079 cases. This assistance benefitted 85,849 individuals and family members in Massachusetts.
- 568 private attorneys collectively donated 45,711 hours of skilled pro bono assistance through MLAC-funded programs, representing a value of more than $10 million, nearly double the assistance received in FY09. This dramatic increase was the result of full-time help provided by deferred law firm associates to some legal aid programs.
- MLAC’s Battered Women’s Legal Assistance Project assisted 2,362 domestic violence victims, most with complex cases involving physical safety, child custody and support, financial security, health care coverage, and other issues. On average, each complex case involved more than three court appearances.
- MLAC’s Disability Benefits Project closed 1,192 cases, winning federal SSI/SSDI benefits for clients in 84 percent of cases in which a decision was made. DBP brought $606,889 in federal reimbursement to the Commonwealth and $8,072,793 in payments to clients over just the first year of benefits.
- MLAC’s Medicare Advocacy Project helped 774 elders and people with disabilities obtain the benefits to which they were entitled.
About six years ago, Natasha Torres and her mother decided they had to move out of their apartment quickly to keep Natasha’s then-13-year-old sister safe. Natasha uses a wheelchair, and the family was having a hard time finding an accessible apartment. Natasha’s mother worked at a store, and one of her customers was a realtor. The realtor told them they could afford to buy their own home and offered to help them look. At the time, Natasha was a student working part-time at a restaurant, but her mother’s job paid well, so it seemed possible. They decided to trust the realtor, since they did not know anything about the home-buying process.

They soon purchased a house in Oxford, but after only eight months, Natasha’s mother got laid off. They continued to make payments, but after their savings ran out, they could not keep up with the mortgage. Still, they did everything they could: Natasha’s mother found a new job at McDonald’s, and Natasha got a second part-time job at a beauty salon. For months she

Isabel Praeger’s one-bedroom apartment in Cambridge has a comfortable living room, kitchen, dining room, and a small front porch. To Isabel, though, it is much more than just a collection of rooms. After the horrific abuse she suffered as a child, this was the first place in which she ever truly felt safe. She first opened the door in 1969, and for more than 40 years, it has remained the only home she has ever known.

That is why when Isabel received a letter one day in 2009 informing her that she was about to be evicted, she thought the world was crashing down around her. The Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA), from which she received assistance paying her rent, had recently decided to issue all payments to landlords via direct deposit. Isabel’s landlord would accept only checks. She

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Natasha shares her family’s emotional foreclosure story with hundreds of private attorneys who gathered at the State House for Walk to the Hill 2011.

Isabel at the window of her attorney’s office.
called the mortgage company every day to see if they could work something out, but the company was unresponsive. Finally, Natasha contacted Community Legal Aid, and an attorney immediately took her case. Two days later she got a notice that their house was being put up for auction.

“I was terrified because moving out seemed impossible,” said Natasha. The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) had customized Natasha’s house to meet her needs, including widening doors, lowering the stove, and building a ramp and a walk-in shower. If she moved, MRC would not provide these services again for 10 years and finding an accessible apartment was very unlikely.

For nearly five years, Natasha’s attorney worked tirelessly to keep her family in their home and to negotiate a federal loan modification. There were numerous setbacks, including one of her loan servicers being investigated for mortgage fraud and going bankrupt. However, in December 2011, the family received the news that the modification was accepted.

Today, Natasha runs her own business, Natasha’s Queen Bee Spa, and she and her mother make enough money to cover their now-reasonable mortgage payments. Speaking of the successful outcome of their long ordeal, Natasha says, “I am the happiest person in the world right now! My head is still in the clouds!”

Called CHA and pleaded with them to make an exception. They would not. She also asked her landlord to accept the deposits, but she too refused. Isabel was about to lose her cherished home.

But soon, Isabel’s luck took a positive turn. Thanks to a referral from the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, she met John Froio, an attorney at Community Legal Services and Counseling Center. At first, John proposed a simple solution. He dropped off a box of stamped-and-addressed envelopes at CHA. Surely they could just drop the check in the mail? However, the answer was still no.

John had no choice but to file a request for accommodation from CHA demanding that they issue the rental assistance via check. In the request, he explained the emotional toll that the situation’s uncertainty had taken on Isabel. Unsure of whether she would be able to keep her home, she had become so distraught that she had to seek medical help. Her anxiety was dangerously close to what she had experienced as a child when she didn’t know if she would have a safe place to sleep at night.

Isabel was overjoyed when CHA accepted the request — her landlord would be satisfied, and she would be able to keep her home. Isabel plans to continue living in the apartment as long as she can, and she is incredibly grateful for John’s help.

“Having a lawyer is what’s kept me from being shuttled off to the poor house,” Isabel explains. “I’m not sure what would have happened if I didn’t have John.”

Programs Join Together to Help Tornado Victims

When a tornado struck western Massachusetts in June, advocates at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI), Massachusetts Justice Project (MJP), and Community Legal Aid (CLA) quickly formed a Legal Tornado Response effort. Within days, information was posted on MassLegalHelp.org to alert tenants in buildings that had been destroyed about condemnation hearings in the housing court, as well as information about cash assistance, SNAP/food stamps, and unemployment insurance benefits for victims. MLRI coordinated with Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) officials to clarify and expand eligibility for SNAP/food stamp benefits. Also, MJP, CLA, and Senior Partners for Justice-West hosted a FEMA-led training session for attorneys on the FEMA application process.
MLAC Grants FY11

EASTERN REGION

GREATER BOSTON LEGAL SERVICES
General Support: $2,095,512
Disability Benefits Project: $325,790
Medicare Advocacy Project: $335,004
Battered Women’s Legal Assistance Project: $766,096
Technology Grants & Services: $123,031
Bart Gordon Fellowship: $50,000
Total: $3,695,433

Subgrantees of GBLS:
COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES AND COUNSELING CENTER
General Support: $57,896
Disability Benefits Project: $17,025
Battered Women’s Legal Assistance Project: $21,166
Total: $96,087

METROWEST LEGAL SERVICES
General Support: $275,056
Disability Benefits Project: $45,931
Battered Women’s Legal Assistance Project: $100,556
Technology Grants & Services: $12,082
Total: $433,625

CENTRAL/WEST REGION

LEGAL ASSISTANCE CORPORATION OF CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
General Support: $563,564
Medicare Advocacy Project: $37,253
Disability Benefits Project: $85,399
Battered Women’s Legal Assistance: $206,033
Technology Grants & Services: $52,203
Fellowships: $50,000
Program Support Grant: $84,100
Total: $1,078,552

WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS LEGAL SERVICES
General Support: $805,837
Medicare Advocacy Project: $53,267
Disability Benefits Project: $97,160
Battered Women’s Legal Assistance: $294,605
Total: $1,250,869

COMMUNITY LEGAL AID
General Support: $456,467
Medicare Advocacy Project: $30,174
Disability Benefits Project: $60,853
Battered Women’s Legal Assistance: $166,880
Total: $714,374

In July 2011, Community Legal Aid began providing legal services in the areas formerly served by the Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts and Western Massachusetts Legal Services.

SOUTHEAST REGION

NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES
General Support: $957,176
Disability Benefits Project: $156,013
Total: $1,113,189

Subgrantees of NLS:
CHILDREN’S LAW CENTER OF MASSACHUSETTS
General Support Local: $72,386
General Support Statewide: $16,904
Technology Grants & Services: $1,524
Total: $90,814
Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts receives both statewide and local funding.

MERRIMACK VALLEY-NORTH SHORE LEGAL SERVICES
Battered Women’s Legal Assistance Project: $376,397
Total: $1,489,586

NORTH AMERICAN LEGAL SERVICES

STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

Center for Law and Education
General Support: $80,499
Technology Grants & Services: $5,773
Total: $86,272

Center for Public Representation
General Support: $136,847
Disability Benefits Project: $33,269
Technology Grants & Services: $7,233
Total: $177,349

Disability Law Center
General Support: $161,000
Disability Benefits Project: $182,257
Technology Grants & Services: $1,798
Total: $345,055

Massachusetts Advocates for Children
General Support: $63,592
Technology Grants & Services: $63,592

Prisoners’ Legal Services
General Support: $104,649
Technology Grants & Services: $1,869
Total: $106,518

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
General Support: $960,000
Battered Women’s Legal Assistance Project: $82,867
Websites Project: $271,933
Farm Workers: $19,280
Technology Grants & Equipment: $74,430
Transition Planning Grant: $10,000
Total: $1,424,510

National Consumer Law Center
General Support: $80,500
Total: $80,500

In July 2011, Community Legal Aid began providing legal services in the areas formerly served by the Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts and Western Massachusetts Legal Services.
# Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

**for the year ending June 30, 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVENUE</th>
<th>Disability Benefits Project</th>
<th>Medicare Advocacy Project</th>
<th>Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project</th>
<th>General Support</th>
<th>IOLTA Committee</th>
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<th>MLAC Administrative</th>
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<th>Fixed Asset Funds</th>
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<th>NET ASSETS</th>
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| NET ASSETS                               | June 30, 2011               |                           |                                           |                 |                 |                      | 0                             | 0                 | 74,396          | 1,186,705       |
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

Rahsaan D. Hall — Chair
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights

Maria Matos — Vice Chair
Client Representative

Timothy M. Linnehan — Treasurer
Administrative Office of the Trial Court

Michael Badger
Badger Legal Group

Marijane Benner Browne
Ropes & Gray LLP

Martha J. Koster
Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, PC

Judith Martinez
Program Board Representative

William C. Newman
Lesser, Newman & Nasser, LLP

Martha Rush O'Mara
Law Office of Martha Rush O'Mara

Martin V. Tomassian, Jr.
Tomassian & Tomassian

Joyce Allen-Beckford
Director, Diversity Coalition

Thomas Brant
Communications and Government Relations Assistant

Mary Doyon
Fiscal Director

Karyn Harding
Director of Information Technology

Janne Hellgren
Acting Director, Equal Justice Coalition

Danielle Hines-Graham
Operations Manager

Walter (Freddy) Matute
Bookkeeper

Brianne Miers
Communications Director

Lonnie A. Powers
Executive Director

Patricia Shaughnessy
Support and Training Specialist

Donna Southwell
Director of Policy Analysis

Patricia Swansey
Program Director

Wayne Welch
Network Administrator

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