

# Legal Aid Link

Volume 6, Issue 4

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## MLAC News

### Racial Justice and Bart Gordon Fellowships

MLAC announced the recipients of the 2013 Racial Justice and Bart Gordon Fellowships on Oct. 24. The Racial Justice Fellowship was awarded to CLE's Pro Bono Education Partnership. Two Bart Gordon Fellowships have been awarded, one to GBLS for their CORI Reentry Project and the other to CLA for their Unemployment Benefit Projects. Stay tuned for more to come on the attorneys who will be hired to fill the fellowship positions. More information on the fellowships is available on the MLAC website:

- [Gordon Fellowship](#)
- [Racial Justice Fellowship](#)

### HomeCorps Borrower Representation Initiative Begins Work

After receiving a \$6 million grant from the office of Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley this summer, MLAC, the National Consumer Law Center and local programs began work in September to represent homeowners facing foreclosure. The two-year effort is part of the Attorney General's HomeCorps initiative, which assists homeowners with loan modifications, researching title issues and providing eviction defense for those who are in danger of losing their homes. The new attorneys hired to work on the project are Allen Acosta, John Burke, Josh Guterrez, Sora Kim, Letty Medina-Richman, Ray Mestre and Uri Strauss at Community Legal Aid; Kristen Antolini and Marc Potvin at Neighborhood Legal Services; Amy Anthony and Jennifer Kurrus at Merrimack Valley-North Shore Legal Services; Dan Daley at MetroWest Legal Services; Liliana Ibara, Todd Kaplin, and Amanda Loring at Greater Boston Legal Services; and Sara Quinn and Mariah Jennings-Rampsi at South Coastal Counties Legal Services. MLAC welcomes the HomeCorps team to the legal services community and is very grateful for their commitment to help borrowers in distress. For more information, go to [www.mass.gov/ago/homecorps](http://www.mass.gov/ago/homecorps).

### MLAC Welcomes Anna Chatillon

MLAC is excited to announce that the newest member of its team, Anna Chatillon, started work Oct. 22. As a Program Assistant, Anna supports the MLAC Executive Director and the Equal Justice Coalition Director. She also supports the Director of Policy Analysis with data analysis. Anna is a recent graduate of Tufts University.



## Client News

### Three Client Board Members Will Attend NLADA Conference

MLAC has awarded scholarships to three legal aid clients to attend the National Legal Aid and Defender Association annual conference in Chicago this December. The recipients are NLS/MVNS board member Wanda Moyer, GBLS board member Alma Woodberry and MWLS board member Nicole Zoni. The Winter 2012 issue of the client newsletter *Unbeatable Advocate* (available [here](#)) will highlight their experiences, so be sure to check back in early January for a recap.

## Equal Justice Coalition

### EJC Ramps Up FY2014 Funding Campaign

The Equal Justice Coalition will ask the Governor and the Legislature to fund the MLAC line item (0321-1600) at \$15.5 million in FY14, an increase of \$3 million over the FY13 appropriation. The EJC Legislative Committee is already working hard to recruit general and in-house counsel and managing partners to support the budget request, and programs are scheduling events with the legislators in their communities. For more information, visit [www.equaljusticecoalition.org](http://www.equaljusticecoalition.org).



## Advocacy Update

### NCLC Files Landmark Foreclosure and Mortgage Discrimination Lawsuit With National Implications

The National Consumer Law Center (NCLC), along with co-counsel ACLU and Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein of San Francisco, recently filed a groundbreaking lawsuit (*Adkins et al. v Morgan Stanley*) in the federal court in the Southern District of New York on behalf of Michigan Legal Services and five African American homeowners in the Detroit, Michigan area. The suit claims that the Defendant violated federal and state housing and anti-discrimination laws by adopting mortgage securitization policies that caused predatory lending and adversely impacted African Americans, including elder homeowners. It is the first case where a prospective class of affected homeowners victimized by subprime lending abuses has directly sued an investment bank by linking civil rights and consumer laws. It is also the first lawsuit to connect racial discrimination to the securitization of mortgage-backed securities. Many of the homeowners had refinanced into subprime mortgages. If the lawsuit receives class certification, it could pave the way for similar lawsuits around the nation. NCLC also recently presented a related webinar, [Holding Wall Street Accountable for the Subprime Mortgage Crisis in Urban Communities](#) and the PowerPoint presentations and audio are available to download for free.



*From left: Gavi Wolfe of the American Civil Liberties Union-Massachusetts, Sondra H. Peskoe of the Public Policy Institute, Rep. Alice Wolf (D-Cambridge), Thomas Mela of MAC and Ann Lambert of the ACLU at the bill's signing.*

## New Massachusetts Law to Reduce School Exclusion

On Aug. 6, Governor Deval Patrick signed a law designed to keep high-risk youth in school by reducing unnecessary exclusions and preventing dropouts. Through the School Discipline Coalition of the Education Law Task Force, Massachusetts Advocates for Children and other legal services and public interest organizations led the advocacy effort to get the law passed. Under the new law, schools are responsible for providing alternative educational services, such as tutoring, alternative placement and online or distance learning to general education students who they exclude long term. Students excluded for more than 10 consecutive days shall have alternative education to enable them to maintain

academic progress. Similarly, students suspended 10 or fewer days must have the opportunity to make up assignments in order to maintain academic progress. Additional due process reforms and drop-out prevention provisions are included in the new law.

More about the new law:

- [Fact sheet \[PDF\]](#)
- [Summary of the bill \[PDF\]](#)
- [Copy of the bill signed by Gov. Patrick \[PDF\]](#)
- [Associated Press story \[PDF\]](#)

## MLRI Awarded HomeCorps Grant for Homelessness Prevention Program

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute received a Crisis Response Innovation Grant from the Attorney General's office to create an innovative Homelessness Prevention Program for the purpose of preventing evictions and maintaining possession for a subset of tenants at high risk for homelessness. MLRI will work with the Massachusetts Justice Project, Community Legal Aid, MetroWest Legal Services and a special advisory panel. The program's overall goal is to defend against unnecessary evictions and provide other legal assistance that will help low income clients avoid homelessness. Lawyers in the field will represent targeted households in eviction proceedings with the goal of preserving tenancies and obtaining necessary repairs and damages, or leveraging sufficient resources to allow tenants to move and find other suitable housing. This project will build on the success achieved by two pilot projects of the Boston Bar Association's Task Force on the Civil Right to Counsel that used a "targeted representation" model to identify a special subset of low income tenants who were at risk of losing their apartments through eviction despite their legal rights. For more information, view the Attorney General's press release [here](#).



### **MLRI, its Legal Services Partners and Community Allies Fight to Protect Homeless Families**

Effective August 6, 2012, the Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) implemented new regulations that deny the vast majority of homeless families with children access to emergency shelter through the Emergency Assistance program. Public hearings on the new regulations were held by the DHCD with packed audiences Oct. 22 in Springfield and Oct. 25 at the State House in Boston. MLRI organized homeless families, legislators, legal services advocates from programs across the state, medical doctors and nurses, domestic violence advocates, social workers, and many others to provide compelling and powerful testimony that focused on the need to preserve the emergency shelter safety net to protect homeless families and children. Seventy organizations around the Commonwealth have signed a [letter](#) [PDF] urging Governor Patrick, Senate and House leadership to modify the new regulations and restore access to emergency shelter for vulnerable children and families.

### **MLRI Spotlights in ABA Magazine**

MLRI was chosen as the featured organization in the [latest edition of Dialogue](#) [PDF], the magazine of the American Bar Association's Division for Legal Services. The piece, "Tough Advocacy for Tough Times," highlights MLRI's multi-forum advocacy and strategies for systemic reform, using as an example its work to preserve affordable housing units in two high-profile cases.

## **People**



FayFoto/Boston

### **"Top Women of Law" Awarded to Legal Aid Attorneys**

Three GBLS attorneys were honored with 2012 Top Women of Law awards from Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly on October 12. Jacquelynne Bowman, executive director; Stefanie Balandis (pictured, holding award), Housing Law Unit senior attorney; and former Family Law Unit senior attorney Kelly Leighton received the awards, which honor "the women making a difference in the legal community."

### **American Constitution Society Honors Bob Sable**

Former GBLS Executive Director Bob Sable was honored with a Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall Award by the Boston Lawyer Chapter of the American Constitution Society on Sept. 13 for his work on access to justice. Bob is currently volunteering in GBLS' Consumer Rights Unit.

### **MVNS Welcomes New Staff and Volunteers**

Jennifer Kurrus, a long time MVNS staff attorney focusing on elder law and, most recently, consumer law, has joined the Attorney General's HomeCorps Project as a supervising attorney. Attorney Amy Anthony, a recent graduate of American University Washington College of Law, has also joined the HomeCorps project at MVNS. Amy's experience includes Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, Women Empowered Against Violence, AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, Inc., and Parents for Ethical Adoption Reform.

Riley Albair has joined MVNS as an AmeriCorps volunteer. Riley will be focusing on intake, family law, emergency shelter and SNAP (food stamps) issues. Riley previously served as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, an international development assistant and a communication and education associate.

Attorney Robin Munson joins MVNS part-time in the Consumer Law Project, handling bankruptcies and foreclosures. Robin has volunteered with MVNS for the past three years, is a solo practitioner and has a prior career as a small business owner. She is the 2011 winner of the MVNS-Greater Lowell Bar Association Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year award.

MVNS also welcomes the following volunteer in-house attorneys: Vatsady Sivongxay, assisting in the consumer law unit; Meghan Bard, assisting in the elder, family and housing law units; and Michael Weinhold, assisting in the consumer law unit.

## Tech Tip: Web Resources

In this month's Tips section, we offer some helpful websites:

[www.slipstick.com](http://www.slipstick.com): Offers information about and troubleshooting for Microsoft Outlook  
**Byte Converter**: Convert bytes to kilobytes, megabytes and gigabytes and vice versa.  
**HTML Codes**: A variety of HTML codes and tips to assist webmasters.  
**LSNTAP**: The website of the Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project

*--Tricia Shaugnessy, MLAC Support and Training Specialist*

## Save the Date

### Walk to the Hill: January 30, 2013

The 2013 Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid will be held Jan. 30 at the Massachusetts State House. The annual lobby day for legal aid funding brings hundreds of attorneys from top law firms to the State House to explain to their legislators why legal aid needs state funding. The event is organized by the Equal Justice Coalition. For more information, visit the [EJC website](#).

## Event Recap

### HomeCorps Borrower Representation Initiative Kickoff

Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley welcomed attorneys participating in the HomeCorps project to assist homeowners facing foreclosure during an Oct. 11 event at Mintz Levin in Boston. The project, funded by the Attorney General's office and administered by MLAC, supports 19 attorneys at Greater Boston Legal Services, Community Legal Aid, South Coastal Counties Legal Services, Neighborhood Legal Services, Merrimack Valley-North Shore Legal Services and MetroWest Legal Services.



*From left, MLAC Executive Director Lonnie Powers, Supreme Judicial Court Justice Ralph Gants (standing) and Attorney General Martha Coakley.*

### MAC Annual Celebration and Silent Auction

MAC's Annual Celebration and Silent Auction observing the 40th anniversary of the Special

Education Law - Chapter 766, was held Oct. 11 in Boston at Bingham McCutchen. At the event, MAC honored former House Speaker David Bartley, who co-sponsored the original special education bill in 1972; Michael Daly (posthumously) who was also a co-sponsor of the bill at the time; and Beverly and Miriam Schwartz, Somerville parents and founders of MAC's Somerville Special Education Advocacy Project. [Click here](#) to visit the MAC website for pictures and more info about the event.

## Media Highlights

For a full list of media coverage, visit the [News](#) section of MLAC's web site.

[New Mass. law gives expelled students more options](#) [PDF]

*Associated Press | August 10, 2012*

Thomas Mela of Massachusetts Advocates for Children is quoted.



### [Where the Bus Stops: Boston Looking to Limit School Busing](#)

*MSNBC | October 13, 2012*

MAC Senior Project Director Kim Janey, head of the Boston School Reform Project, was a panel participant on MSNBC's Melissa Harris-Perry Show. The panelists took a historical look at the issue of student assignment and busing in Boston and the current push for equitable access to quality education.

## "People Pages"

[CLICK HERE](#) to print "People Pages," an alphabetical directory of Massachusetts Legal Services staff members and their contact information (NOTE: You must log in to [MassLegalServices.org](#) in order to access the list). You can also look up staff individually by last name using the search feature on [MassLegalServices.org](#).

## Got News?

**Do you have news that you'd like to share with the Massachusetts legal services community?**

Contact the person responsible for communications at your program, or email your submissions to the editor ([tbrant@mlac.org](mailto:tbrant@mlac.org)). Legal Aid Link is a quarterly newsletter. The next edition will be published in January 2013.

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