

# Funding Civil Legal Aid

## \$41 million for FY23

Line Item 0321-1600  
FY22 Appropriation: \$35 million

### The need for civil legal aid intensified during the pandemic

Legal aid cases increased significantly during the pandemic in several areas. In each year of COVID-19, legal aid organizations have seen on average:

- **4,643** income maintenance cases, a **73% total jump**
- **2,788** unemployment insurance compensation cases, a **353% total spike**
- **3,039** family law cases, a **24% total increase**
- **7,778** housing cases, an **8% total increase**
- **2,504** immigration representation cases, a **15% total increase**
- **323** bankruptcy cases, an **11% total rise**

Even before the crisis, **insufficient funding** forced legal aid organizations to turn away the majority of eligible people who sought help. Recent funding increases have enabled civil legal aid organizations to **reduce the percent of eligible people turned away to 57%**, down from 64% five years ago.

### Civil legal aid is an essential service

**Civil legal aid is a vital part of the Commonwealth's response to the COVID-19 crisis**, helping resolve issues related to housing, unemployment, debt, health care, domestic violence, and more.

**Low-income people are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, the faltering economy**, unemployment, housing insecurity, and other threats to their health, safety, and stability that often require legal assistance to resolve.

### Legal aid last year:

**92,000**  
people benefited

**\$103**  
million

in economic benefits to  
the Commonwealth and  
residents

**330**  
cities and towns in  
Massachusetts reached  
by legal aid

People with an income  
at or below **125%** of  
the federal poverty line  
—\$33,125/year for a  
family of four—**are**  
eligible for civil legal aid.

**“I do believe that if I didn’t [have legal aid] to help with the appeal... I would not have been able to get my family out of that financial burden.”**

**Malensky**, who got her job back after being wrongfully fired after using FMLA to care for her daughter when the pandemic forced schools to close

**“Not only were we able to keep our home and keep from being thrown out on the streets, but now we have the opportunity to purchase the home.”**

**Raymond**, a U.S. Army veteran who received civil legal aid when his landlord sought to evict him and his family after he complained about hazardous conditions in his home

## **MLAC provides the crucial infrastructure that connects the legal aid network serving every corner of the state**

**MLAC is the largest funding source for civil legal aid in the Commonwealth.** It distributes funding to 6 regional and 10 statewide legal aid organizations across Massachusetts.

In addition to funding, MLAC provides support with information technology; data and research; hiring and recruitment; diversity, equity and inclusion; and communications. MLAC also partners with legal aid organizations, bar associations, and the Access to Justice Commission to activate a network of pro bono lawyers and publish legal self-help materials.

## **Delivering on the promise of equal justice for all**

**Civil legal aid organizations provide advice and representation at no cost to low-income people who need help** with serious legal issues. Without legal aid, residents must navigate a complex court system alone—with potentially dire consequences to their health and well-being.

Everyone deserves a fair process during civil proceedings, regardless of income. **Legal aid helps Massachusetts deliver on the promise of equal justice for all.**

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