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.

People with an income at or below 125% of the federal poverty line—$34,688/year for a family of four—are eligible for civil legal aid.

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
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.

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.**