ANNUAL REPORT FY 2021

Funding Access to Justice During COVID-19

MLAC
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation
Dear Friends of Legal Aid,

As the COVID-19 pandemic descended in full force on Massachusetts, its worst effects fell upon low-income people and people of color. In huge numbers, people turned to civil legal aid organizations for help to prevent evictions, file unemployment claims, address dangerous domestic violence issues, and receive public benefits. Legal aid organizations provided essential services, ensuring that as many people as possible could receive help to protect their basic needs during a global public health crisis.

Legal aid advocates employed innovative solutions to provide services while courts and legal aid offices were operating remotely. The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation provided crucial infrastructure to the legal aid network, bolstering technology and seeking additional funds to meet the extraordinary demand. MLAC sought and received its largest-ever state appropriation in the FY21 budget: $29 million. Through its grant-funding process, MLAC distributed that money to 16 statewide and regional legal aid organizations.

MLAC received funds from several other sources, amplifying the financial support it was able to provide to civil legal aid organizations. In FY21, MLAC received more than $6.5 million from the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program and related funds. And it took in more than $6.8 million in government and foundation grants.

In addition, MLAC received and administered nearly $8.1 million through the COVID Eviction Legal Help Project. CELHP was part of the Baker-Polito Administration's Eviction Diversion Initiative, which was implemented in October 2020 to help keep people in their homes during the pandemic. Building on MLAC's well-established funding infrastructure, CELHP operated through a statewide legal services delivery network to provide free legal assistance to income-eligible tenants and to owner-occupant landlords of two- and three-family homes.

In total, MLAC distributed $44,406,740 in FY21 to organizations that provide civil legal aid. The work of those organizations benefited more than 92,000 people in 330 cities and towns across the Commonwealth.

The pandemic intensified the difficulties low-income residents of Massachusetts were already facing. Civil legal aid advocates were a lifeline to tens of thousands of people during the crisis, and they have proven themselves time and again to be a central part of the Commonwealth's social safety net, not only providing direct help to people in danger of losing vital services, but also partnering with social service organizations to expand their reach and impact.

This report details the response of MLAC and civil legal aid organizations in FY21. Their collective efforts during this time of unprecedented need have been extraordinary, rising to meet an enormous challenge to deliver access to justice during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for your interest and support in expanding access to legal aid and working toward a more just Commonwealth for all.

Lynne M. Parker
Executive Director

Mala M. Rafik
Chair, Board of Directors
The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation is the largest source for civil legal aid funding in the Commonwealth.

**BACKGROUND** MLAC was established by the Commonwealth in 1983 to ensure that low-income people with critical non-criminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice, and representation.

**MISSION** Our mission is to provide leadership and support to improve civil legal services to low-income people in Massachusetts through collaboration with the legal services community, the public, the bar, and the legislature.

**FUNDING** MLAC receives funding from a variety of sources, primarily the state budget and Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) funds, and disperses it to qualified civil legal aid organizations across the Commonwealth.

**MLAC Revenue Sources (FY 2021)**

- **$29 million**: State appropriation
- **$6.5 million**: IOLTA
- **$14.9 million**: Grants and other revenue

**$44,406,740**

Total of grants awarded by MLAC in FY 2021

In addition to funding, MLAC also provides these organizations with support in: communications; data and research; diversity, equity, and inclusion; information technology; and program monitoring and evaluation.

**ABOUT CIVIL LEGAL AID**

Civil legal aid organizations provide advice and representation at no cost to low-income people who otherwise would not receive help with serious legal issues related to housing, healthcare, immigration, employment, education, family law and domestic violence, disability, consumer problems, and elder issues. To be eligible for legal services in FY21, a family of four would have to have an annual income at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level: $33,125.

Although the U.S. and Massachusetts Constitutions guarantee criminal defendants a right to counsel, most people in civil cases do not have that right, even though the consequences of civil cases can be severe: people can lose their homes, health, safety, family, and financial stability—without ever having spoken to a lawyer. Civil legal aid seeks to ensure that all residents of Massachusetts have equal access to justice.
MASSACHUSETTS LEGAL ASSISTANCE CORPORATION

STATEWIDE ORGANIZATIONS
Statewide Organizations specialize in specific subjects or types of law. They also provide support to the regional organizations.

- **Center for Law and Education** provides expertise on education-related cases.
- **Center for Public Representation** enforces and expands the rights of people with disabilities and others who are in segregated settings.
- **Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts** advocates for the rights of young people.
- **Disability Law Center** is the Protection and Advocacy agency for Massachusetts, protecting the rights of people with disabilities.
- **Massachusetts Advocates for Children** represents children, students, and youth who face significant barriers because of their economic status, disability, race, ethnicity/culture, immigration status, language, and/or traumatic life experiences.
- **Massachusetts Law Reform Institute** provides statewide advocacy and leadership in advancing laws, policies, and practices that secure economic, racial, and social justice for low-income people and communities.
- **National Consumer Law Center** advises on consumer law issues, including student loans, debt collection, disaster protection, mortgages, and consumer protection.
- **Political Asylum/Immigration Representation (PAIR) Project** provides legal services to asylum seekers and promotes the rights of detained immigrants.
- **Prisoners’ Legal Services** protects the health and civil rights of people who are incarcerated.
- **Veterans Legal Services** promotes the self-sufficiency, stability, and financial security of homeless and low-income Veterans.

In November 2021, two lawyers with Greater Boston Legal Services helped negotiate an agreement to keep hundreds of tenants in the Mattapan neighborhood of Boston safely housed during the pandemic.

A group of tenants at the Morton Village Apartments learned their complex was being sold and worried that could lead to rent increases or evictions. They formed a tenants’ association and reached a deal with their new landlord, Avanath Capital. The agreement established a five-year lease for all residents in the apartment complex with rent increases of 3 percent per year for the first three years and 3.25 percent per year for the fourth and fifth years. For seniors over 70, rent increases will hold steady at 3 percent for five years.

The agreement is a model for other tenant groups and landlords, GBLS lawyer Maggie Gribben told *The Boston Globe*. “This is something that’s possible for other landlords to do. And it creates a mutual respect from the very beginning,” Gribben was joined by GBLS lawyer Loren Forbes in supporting the negotiations.
Civil legal advocates help people of all ages address many vital issues.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS
Civil legal aid plays a crucial role in protecting and securing safe and affordable housing by:
- Helping people obtain rental assistance during the pandemic
- Enforcing health, safety, and accessibility standards
- Advocating for access to affordable housing
- Defending clients from unlawful eviction and combating housing discrimination
- Protecting tenants at risk of losing housing subsidies
- Helping place vulnerable families in emergency shelters

IMMIGRATION
Civil legal aid lawyers assist immigrants and refugees by:
- Ensuring fair treatment and due process
- Assisting individuals navigating DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and TPS (Temporary Protected Status)
- Educating people on their rights and responsibilities through workshops
- Helping people secure the right to live and work in the U.S. legally
- Removing barriers to education for immigrants
- Protecting access to safety net programs

EMPLOYMENT-RELATED SERVICES
Civil legal aid organizations conduct policy advocacy on behalf of workers in partnership with unions, workers’ groups, and social service providers. Civil legal aid helps low-income people facing:
- Improper denial of unemployment compensation
- Wage theft
- Employment discrimination
- Unsafe working conditions or unfair labor standards

During the pandemic, advocates have found innovative ways to help people without computer access or with limited English proficiency file online unemployment applications and appeal wrongful denials.

FAMILY LAW & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
Civil legal aid helps families maintain their safety and independence by:
- Providing advice and representation and enforcing legal protections for survivors of domestic violence
- Securing favorable property settlements and preventing foreclosure and eviction
- Enforcing divorce and child support orders
- Addressing denial of benefits

During the COVID-19 crisis, access to patients in medical-legal partnership clinics has been challenging because of remote visits. Advocates use innovative strategies to connect with clients and address legal issues that cause health problems during the pandemic.

CHILDREN & EDUCATION
Civil legal aid lawyers help children experiencing issues related to:
- Access to equal education and equal opportunity during the pandemic, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, language, or disability
- Immigration, family separation, and asylum
- Guardianship, custody, domestic violence, and other family law issues
- Public benefits for families, including: SNAP disability benefits, emergency assistance, and access to health care
- Trauma that affects children’s ability to succeed in school

MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS
In these partnerships, civil legal aid attorneys work alongside medical professionals and help address the root cause of an illness. For example, while a doctor can treat the symptoms of a child’s breathing problems caused by mold in their apartment, a legal aid lawyer can help ensure the landlord complies with public health and safety laws and regulations.

During the COVID-19 crisis, access to medical care has been challenging because of remote visits. Advocates use innovative strategies to connect with clients and address medical issues.

INCOME MAINTENANCE
Civil legal aid lawyers work to ensure that people can access basic necessities and obtain the benefits that they are qualified to receive, by:
- Helping people gain access to government benefits, such as SNAP (food stamps), Social Security, SSI (Supplemental Security Income), SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance), TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and Veterans Benefits
- Assisting people who have been wrongly denied benefits
- Aiding people who need help filing for, or appealing, a denial of unemployment benefits

OLDER ADULTS
Civil legal aid lawyers assist older adults facing issues related to:
- Housing and physical safety
- Access to health care, disability benefits, Medicare, Social Security, veterans’ benefits, and other public benefits
- Bankruptcy, financial abuse, and other consumer law challenges
- Guardianship, care of children and grandchildren, and other family law issues
- Durable powers of attorney and health care proxies
- Nursing home issues, including transfer and discharge, conditions and evictions
FY 2021 by the Numbers

Cases Funded

- **41,429** Total cases handled by MLAC-funded organizations
- **1,379** Cases handled by the Disability Benefits Project, securing federal SSI/SSDI benefits for elderly residents and those with long-term disabilities
- **1,720** Cases handled by the Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project, addressing physical safety, child custody and support, and health care coverage
- **270** Cases handled by the Medicare Advocacy Project, assisting elders and people with disabilities

Issue Areas

- 30% Housing
- 20% Income Maintenance
- 19% Individual Rights
- 12% Family
- 7% Education
- 4% Consumer
- 3% Miscellaneous
- 2% Employment
- 2% Health
- 1% Juvenile

Pro Bono and Reduced Fee Attorneys

- **2,395** private attorneys collectively accepted

Full-Time Staff

- **393** Attorneys
- **107** Paralegals

Locations Served

- 94% of Massachusetts cities and towns had at least one person with a case handled by a civil legal aid organization
- 62% of Massachusetts cities and towns had at least 10 people with a case handled by a civil legal aid organization

Client Demographics

- **92,000** people benefited

Race and Ethnicity

- 40% White non-Hispanic
- 27% Hispanic/Latino
- 20% Black non-Hispanic
- 7% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 6% Other

Age of Clients

- **Under 18**: 7%
- **18-59**: 71%
- **60 and Over**: 22%

- **3,463** cases through legal aid organizations on behalf of low-income residents

- **48,766** hours of pro bono work worth **$11 million**

The few towns that did not have a single person helped by civil legal aid in FY 2021 are among the least populous in Massachusetts.
Free Legal Resources Online

MLAC provides annual funding to the Websites Project, administered by the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. The Websites Project runs several free websites to help people find information about legal rights and where to find legal help.

**MASSLEGALHELP.ORG**
MassLegalHelp.org provides practical information about civil legal issues. Its mission is to improve access to justice for low-income and disadvantaged people. Written by advocates in the legal services community, the website connects, supports, and educates the general public. It’s a collaborative effort of the Massachusetts civil legal aid community, maintained by staff at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute.

It provides information in seven languages: English, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

**MASS LEGAL ANSWERS ONLINE**
mass.freelegalanswers.org
Mass Legal Answers Online is a virtual legal advice clinic that enables low-income Massachusetts residents to obtain free legal advice from volunteer attorneys. Since MLAO’s launch in November 2016, 485 attorneys from across the Commonwealth have signed up to answer more than 6,600 questions on civil legal topics, such as housing, family, consumer debt, and employment.

The goal of MLAO is to expand access to justice by providing both clients and volunteers a platform to obtain and give free legal advice at a time and place of their choosing. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when many in-person opportunities for help were unavailable, MLAO has provided a unique, vital resource for thousands of low-income individuals.

MLRI administers the site, with help from the Volunteer Lawyers Project of the Boston Bar Association. MLAO is part of the national American Bar Association Free Legal Answers Project.

**MASSACHUSETTS LEGAL RESOURCE FINDER**
masslrf.org
Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder is a website that helps low-income Massachusetts residents find legal help and information. People can enter a short description of their legal problem into a search box or pick a topic from a list. The site also prompts them to enter their income, household size, zip code, and whether they are age 60 or older.

The results page offers information about legal aid organizations that might be able to help them, as well as links to legal information.
**ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN THE COVID-19 Crisis**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges low-income people face and created new ones. With a surge in demand for services, civil legal aid organizations have developed innovative ways to provide remote legal help and reach more people. MLAC has provided essential infrastructure to the state’s legal aid network to help them adapt quickly to the changing needs of clients and organizations during the pandemic.

Civil legal aid is a significant component of the Commonwealth’s response to and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, which has had a disproportionate impact on low-income residents, people of color, those with disabilities, older adults, and immigrants, among other already-vulnerable groups. Since the start of the pandemic, legal aid organizations have responded to urgent needs, helping people avoid eviction and homelessness, receive unemployment benefits, and gain equal access to public education and health care. The pandemic also exacerbated many individuals’ mental health challenges and intensified domestic violence. Advocates have helped clients cope with those additional stresses that can complicate civil legal needs.

Important new legislation and policies, such as the eviction moratorium and emergency provisions for the unemployed, have provided a lifeline for residents. Civil legal aid has been critical in helping people obtain these pandemic resources.

As vital community partners with community-based and social service agencies, legal aid organizations have provided expertise, training, referrals, and materials to other frontline advocates working directly with people experiencing poverty.

**SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY WORK**

Since March 2020, legal aid advocates have been engaged in developing legislation to: extend the eviction moratorium; implement the COVID Eviction Legal Help Project (CELHP); create and pass the state Lost Wages Bill; craft the federal Continuation Assistance Act, which increased unemployment benefits for people qualifying for Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Benefits; and extend free school meals benefits to children with disabilities being raised by grandparents or other relatives (SSI kinship).

**ADVANCING RACIAL JUSTICE**

Racial health disparities—highlighted by the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color—present ongoing issues for low-income people of color and have historically been under-addressed. Access to care issues and social determinants of health, such as living situations, often require legal assistance to resolve. Legal aid lawyers are helping to prevent factors that cause poor health—such as unsafe or overcrowded housing—and ensure that people of color receive equal access to treatment.

**INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS**

MLAC has helped the legal aid organizations it funds to be as effective as possible when courts and service offices were operating remotely. Its technology infrastructure allowed legal aid organizations to strengthen remote operations so advocates and their clients could participate fully in virtual court hearings. MLAC also provides centralized technology and expertise that reduces technology costs for many of the organizations it funds.

Remote court hearings and work have created obstacles for low-income people without access to computers or high-speed internet. People with low computer literacy, which includes many older adults, as well as people with limited English proficiency, face additional challenges. People without representation are frequently defaulted or have their cases dismissed because they are unable to access the technology they need to appear in court remotely.

Legal aid staff have responded creatively to address these barriers. Organizations have helped clients learn to use new technology. They have invested in computer hardware and video technology for remote staff and developed necessary security protocols for remote work. In addition, legal aid organizations have provided clients with telephone and video links, as well as low-cost cell phones, so they could appear in court and communicate virtually for remote court hearings. These resources also help people who are unable to take time off from work or arrange childcare to attend in-person meetings and hearings.

**COVID EVICTION LEGAL HELP PROJECT**

Housing and public health are inextricably linked. The COVID Eviction Legal Help Project, which began in October 2020 after the Commonwealth’s pause of evictions and foreclosures expired, provided legal assistance in pandemic-related eviction cases. It expanded the capacity of legal aid organizations to provide essential help to low-income tenants facing eviction due to COVID-19 and to eligible landlords who are owner-occupants of two- and three-family homes.

The program was part of the Baker-Polito Administration’s Eviction Diversion Initiative to support tenants and landlords facing financial challenges caused by the pandemic, and was funded by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. MLAC oversaw the delivery of services through contracts with the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, the Volunteer Lawyers Project, and six regional legal aid organizations across the state: Community Legal Aid, De Novo, Greater Boston Legal Services, MetroWest Legal Services, Northeast Legal Aid, and South Coastal Counties Legal Services.

CELHP provided referrals, legal information, assistance, and legal representation in all settings of the Massachusetts Housing Court, including the Lawyer for the Day program, to preserve or achieve housing stability. When possible, it also provided legal assistance in District Courts with high-volume summary process caseloads and to prevent the termination of subsidies prior to court to avert eviction.

In FY21, CELHP handled 3,047 cases statewide and aided at least 7,700 people, of whom at least 2,600 were children.
In addition to providing funding for legal aid, MLAC supports organizations with a range of special funding and services.

Funding for Immigrants’ Rights

**GREATER BOSTON IMMIGRANT DEFENSE FUND**
MLAC created the Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund in partnership with the City of Boston Mayor’s Office for Immigrant Advancement, the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, and a group of foundations in 2017. The fund supports legal aid and community organizations that represent and provide legal information to immigrants facing deportation who cannot afford a lawyer.

The Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund leverages national funding support as a member of the Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees’ nationwide Delivering on the Dream Initiative. The fund has awarded more than $2 million to a network of legal aid and community organizations—which builds the capacity of Eastern Massachusetts to protect vulnerable immigrants, refugees, and temporary status holders and respond to federal policy shifts.

**Organizations that receive GBIDF funds:**
- Brazilian Worker Center
- Catholic Social Services of Fall River
- Centro Presente
- Chelsea Collaborative
- Essex County Community Organization
- Greater Boston Legal Services
- Immigrant Family Services Institute
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- MetroWest Legal Services
- Northeast Legal Aid
- PAIR Project
- South Coastal Counties Legal Services

**IMMIGRATION LEGAL ASSISTANCE FUND**
In 2019, with funding from an anonymous donor, MLAC created the Massachusetts Immigration Legal Assistance Fund to respond to persistent unmet legal needs among vulnerable immigrant and refugee populations in the Commonwealth. MILAF provides funding to organizations that work to fill the gaps within services to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. MILAF’s aim is to protect the rights of vulnerable immigrants so they can pursue a stable future. In FY 2021, the fund awarded more than $800,000 to twelve organizations, providing direct legal services, community education, and systemic advocacy that benefit large groups of immigrants.

**Organizations that receive MILAF funds:**
- Community Legal Aid
- Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts
- De Novo Center for Justice and Healing
- Greater Boston Legal Services
- Health Law Advocates
- Justice at Work
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- Northeast Legal Aid
- PAIR Project
- Prisoners’ Legal Services
- Rian Immigrant Center
- South Coastal Counties Legal Services

**Aiding Victims of Crime**

**THE CIVIL LEGAL AID FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME INITIATIVE**
The Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime initiative helps victims of crime throughout Massachusetts with their related civil legal problems—including family law, housing, immigration, disability rights, child welfare, education, consumer, identity theft, employment rights and public benefits.

Crime victims often experience difficult legal problems that cannot be solved through the criminal law system. For example, a victim of an assault may be unable to work, leading to financial distress including an eviction and debt collection problems. Or, a survivor of domestic violence may need legal help to get a divorce and child support.

The CLAVC Initiative is supported by the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance through a Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA) grant from the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. MOVA advocates for and assists victims of crime through survivor-informed policy development, fund administration, training, and individual assistance. The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute and the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation provide training, support and overall CLAVC project coordination.

**Nine CLAVC-funded civil legal aid organizations provide direct legal services to victims of crime:**
- Community Legal Aid
- De Novo Center for Justice and Healing
- Greater Boston Legal Services
- MetroWest Legal Services
- Northeast Legal Aid
- South Coastal Counties Legal Services
- Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts
- Disability Law Center
- Victim Rights Law Center

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**DLC FINDS ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN DEATH OF DISCHARGED PATIENT**

The Disability Law Center issued a major Death Investigation Report in June 2021 announcing the results of its investigation into the tragic death of CaSonya King, a Northbridge area woman and former data professional. CaSonya King died at age 44, within 30 hours of being left on Boston streets by High Point Hospital, which discharged her from a Middleborough inpatient mental health unit against her will three years ago.

The report, “Out of Time: The Tragic Death of CaSonya King and the Practice of Patient Dumping” analyzes hospital medical records, DHM investigative records, and legal records, along with information gathered from interviews and fact investigation. The report also describes CaSonya’s death against the backdrop of so-called “patient dumping” incidents across the country. Following its investigation, undertaken as the designated Protection and Advocacy system for the Commonwealth, DLC found that the actions of High Point Hospital, in discharging CaSonya King without a meaningful and effective discharge plan, constituted neglect and a dangerous practice that contributed to CaSonya King’s death.
Strengthening Technology

CENTRAL TECHNOLOGY PROJECT
The Central Technology Project seeks to standardize technology for MLAC-funded legal aid organizations in Massachusetts. It provides support and training and serves as the Help Desk for legal aid staff across Massachusetts.

The staff of the Central Technology Project oversees computer hardware and software, telephone and internet service, video conferencing, and networks. Centralizing the legal aid community’s technology provides vital infrastructure to the legal aid network, and it improves efficiency and lowers costs.

At the onset of the pandemic, Central Technology staff moved quickly to ensure that, even as the state went into emergency lockdown because of COVID-19, legal aid staff were still able to aid clients in need. They rerouted telephone systems to reach remote workers, secured laptops and internet connections, and provided months of ongoing technology support to ensure that advocates could work safely from home. With video conferencing in high-demand, they also secured new products to ensure lawyers could talk to clients and appear in virtual court sessions.

Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION INITIATIVE
The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team provides resources to help legal aid organizations with their efforts to promote internal equity, and exemplify racial justice through education and training, improved hiring practices, statewide events, and collaboration.

One way MLAC pursues this initiative is through the Statewide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council, led by Tonysha Taylor, MLAC’s director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The Council encourages transparency and communication between MLAC and the organizations it funds and promotes shared solutions to persistent inequities.

In FY21, the DEI Team:
• Presented a session at the Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education Annual Legal Aid conference, “The Intersection of Systemic Racism and Poverty,” focusing on lessons that lead to action and sustainable long term change
• In partnership with the Boston Bar Association, planned its 2021 DEI Conference: “It’s Time: Centering Anti-Racism in Civil Legal Aid — Successes, Challenges and Next Steps”
• Co-hosted the Amplifying Unheard Voices series with the BBA, highlighting perspectives of underrepresented attorneys, clients, and communities that engage with the legal system regularly, with the goal of moving toward more equitable representation of and opportunities for these communities
• Continued to partner with grantee organizations to offer DEI-related trainings

In addition, MLAC’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team improves services to low-income clients by building cultural competence, addressing diversity-related issues, and promoting equity within MLAC and the civil legal aid organizations it funds, and other stakeholders such as the Access to Justice Commission.
AG, chief justice, hundreds of attorneys call for increased funding at Talk to the Hill

With demand for civil legal aid surging amid the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of attorneys and law students gathered online in January 2021 to make the case for increased state funding for civil legal aid.

The 22nd annual Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid was reinvented this year as the Talk to the Hill, an online meeting headlined by Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Kimberly Budd, and Michael Curry, president of the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers.

“We need civil legal aid to be stronger than ever before,” said Healey, supporting the $35 million in funding that the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation is seeking in FY22—a $6 million increase over FY21. Though she refers to the Attorney General’s office as “the People’s Law Firm,” Healey said, “Legal services attorneys are the people’s lawyers.”

Louis Tompros, chair of the Equal Justice Coalition and partner at WilmerHale, chaired the online meeting, and opened with a moving video tribute to the late SJC Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants, who died unexpectedly in September 2020. A longtime champion of civil legal aid, Chief Justice Gants spoke annually at the Walk to the Hill. “We deeply miss his leadership, and we deeply miss his inspiration,” Tompros said.

Chief Justice Kimberly Budd continued the tradition of the Court’s support of increased civil legal aid funding. “The tragic events of the past year have focused our attention on the many inequities in our society. The pandemic has created unprecedented disruptions in employment, education, childcare, and everyday life. And the resulting hardships have fallen most heavily on those who can least afford them,” said Chief Justice Budd. “If we are truly committed to eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in our society, one of the simplest steps that we can take toward that goal is to make it possible for more people to receive legal aid.”

The annual Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid is hosted by the Equal Justice Coalition, a partnership of the Massachusetts Bar Association, the Boston Bar Association, and MLAC. MLAC Executive Director Lynne Parker said, “As we look to FY22, we are increasingly concerned that the number of those who qualify for civil legal aid will continue to rise as a result of the pandemic.” She noted that civil legal aid is an essential service, and “a significant and critical part of the Commonwealth’s social safety network.”

Michael Curry, of the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers, stressed the importance of having lawyers on the front line of public health issues to confront the “social determinants of health.” He asked lawyers to “lean in at this moment,” and urged the legislature to increase critical funding for civil legal aid.

Two clients shared their stories of how legal aid lawyers kept them and their families safely housed and financially stable during the pandemic.

“If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that civil legal aid is an essential resource for vulnerable individuals and families,” said Denise Murphy, president of the Massachusetts Bar Association. “The number of civil cases involving critical legal issues has risen dramatically, as has the number of people who qualify for assistance.”

Boston Bar President Martin Murphy also made the case for increased funding. “At the core of the rule of law is a vision of equality, a belief that the law should protect us all—not just the rich, or the powerful, or the privileged,” he said. “But we know the rule of law can’t defend itself. Without funding for civil legal aid lawyers—the lawyers who are truly essential frontline workers in the fight for economic and racial justice—the vision of equal access to justice that breathes life is an illusion.”

At the conclusion of the speaking program, lawyers, advocates, and law students broke into 40 Zoom meetings with members of the state legislature to advocate for the funding increase. Jacquelynne Bowman, executive director of Greater Boston Legal Services, urged them to tell their legislators, “People are hurting, and many of our most vulnerable neighbors, who struggled before the pandemic, are at even greater risk today.”

Tompros added, “Tell them civil legal aid is an essential service, and anyone who needs a lawyer should have one.”

Malensky and Raymond shared their stories with hundreds of lawyers, law students, and advocates in January 2021 at Talk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid—a virtual lobby day urging the state legislature to increase legal aid funding.

Raymond Malo, a U.S. Army veteran, received help from Veterans Legal Services after his landlord sought to evict him and his family after he complained about hazardous conditions in his home. His lawyer not only prevented the eviction, but also is helping him try to purchase the property from the new owners of his duplex. Thanks to VLS, Mello said, “we were able to keep from being thrown out on the streets, and now we have the opportunity to purchase the home.”

Malensky Oscar was wrongly terminated from her job after she took time off to care for her young daughter, whose school closed due to the pandemic. Her job was pressuring her to return, but said she could take unpaid leave through the Family Medical Leave Act. When she tried to return after a three-month leave, Oscar was fired. She applied for back pay and unemployment compensation, but was denied. Her doctor suggested she contact Greater Boston Legal Services, which helped her appeal the denial. “Within a matter of weeks, they were able to have the decision overturned and my funds released to me,” Oscar said.
As a result of the pandemic, the rising demand for civil legal aid in Massachusetts is straining existing resources and requires greater funding on the state level.

The growing number of people who urgently need assistance includes people trapped with an abusive partner; students with disabilities, who still have a right to an equal education; prisoners, whose sentence should not include a life-threatening illness; and undocumented immigrants facing the prospect of deportation amid a global emergency.

The Massachusetts Legislature has consistently demonstrated broad support for legal aid. That said, the social and economic consequences of COVID-19 will continue to generate a surge of need that will overwhelm our legal aid system unless adequate funding is provided. Substantial and sustained support for civil legal aid must be part of the Commonwealth’s answer to the pandemic.

The decision, which was authored by the late Chief Justice Ralph Gants in September 2020, will benefit programs providing civil legal services to low-income and elderly Massachusetts residents. IOLTA funds are distributed to the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation and the Massachusetts and Boston Bar Foundations to support civil legal services and access to justice initiatives.

“In a year filled with loss and injustice, this decision is a ray of hope,” said MA IOLTA Committee Chair, Hannah Kilson. “In finding that the principal in an IOLTA account is not subject to the abandoned property statute, the SJC is rightly exercising its superintendence authority over the practice of law. The decision provides lawyers with the necessary guidance on how to address the issue of unidentifiable IOLTA funds while providing underfunded legal services programs with a small but badly needed source of additional funding.”
Civil legal aid lawyers and staff across the Commonwealth received honors and recognition for their advocacy on behalf of low-income Massachusetts residents.

**BOSTON BAR ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT’S AWARD**

Six lawyers with Prisoners’ Legal Services—Elizabeth Matos, Michael Horrell, David Milton, James Pingeon, Bonita Tenneriello, and Jessica White—were part of a team honored by the Boston Bar Association for their work representing incarcerated individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lawyers, from the public and private sector, worked diligently to file lawsuits on behalf of vulnerable Massachusetts prisoners facing unsafe conditions in prisons across the Commonwealth.

“We are proud to recognize these lawyers for fulfilling the very best tradition of our profession by representing the most vulnerable among us, even as we recognize that their work will and must continue.”

BBA President Marty Murphy

**NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT LAW PROJECT JERRY HILDEBRAND UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CHAMPION AWARD**

Greater Boston Legal Services mourns the loss of Brian Flynn, leader of the Asian Outreach/ Employment Law Unit, who led a 24-year career at Greater Boston Legal Services. Shortly before his passing, Flynn received the National Employment Law Project’s Jerry Hildebrand Unemployment Insurance Champion Award for his commitment to pursuing justice for unemployed workers. 

“While Brian’s tireless advocacy has advanced development of unemployment insurance law in Massachusetts and the nation, it is his personal qualities that have left an indelible impression on the legal services community, the hundreds of workers he has represented and the wider national network of UI advocates.”

National Employment Law Project

**SHRIVER CENTER RACIAL JUSTICE INSTITUTE FELLOWS**

Four staff members from Community Legal Aid, serving low-income and elderly residents of Central and Western Massachusetts, were selected to participate in the 2020 Racial Justice Institute, a leadership program organized by the Shriver Center on Poverty Law. The Institute is a seven-month program designed to equip, train and coordinate anti-poverty advocates to affirmatively advance racial equity.

The advocates from Community Legal Aid selected to participate were Daniel Bahls, staff attorney—Housing Unit and Veterans Medical-Legal Partnership; Alyssa Golden, staff attorney - Re-Entry/Housing Project; Nina Harrison, Racial Justice Fellow; and Weayonoh Nelson-Davies, managing attorney of Worcester and Fitchburg offices.

**MASSACHUSETTS BAR FOUNDATION LIFE FELLOW**

The Massachusetts Bar Foundation recognized Greater Boston Legal Services Executive Director Jacquelynne Bowman as a Massachusetts Bar Foundation Life Fellow at the MBF 2021 Annual Meeting in March. 

“The MBF is a community of lawyers and judges who are passionate about enhancing access to justice in our state and who are driven to make that a reality for as many people as they can.”

Robert J. Ambrogi, Esq., MBF Trustee and Past President

**MASSACHUSETTS BAR ASSOCIATION ACCESS TO JUSTICE AWARDS**

Greater Boston Legal Services staff attorney Brian Kiwanuka received the Massachusetts Bar Association’s Access to Justice Rising Star Award at the MBA Access to Justice Awards Celebration in March.

“Mr. Kiwanuka’s intelligence, passion and exceptional commitment to the plight of immigrants and low income people make him an ideal candidate for this award...Mr. Kiwanuka applies his passion and desire for his clients’ victory to every case he encounters.”

Award Nominator
MLAC funds two fellowships for recent law school graduates and for more seasoned attorneys interested in expanding the delivery of legal services in traditionally underserved communities.

The Bart Gordon Fellowship, named in honor of Springfield attorney and founding MLAC board member Bart J. Gordon who passed away in 1995, helps legal aid organizations enhance their services by providing funding to hire recent law school graduates equipped to assist underserved communities. The fellowship, for which MLAC-funded legal aid organizations compete each year, provides financial support to qualified new attorneys. Four Gordon Fellows are funded each year for a one-year term, with an option to renew for a second year.

The Racial Justice Fellowship was created in 2006 to expand the reach of legal aid in communities that have had difficulty obtaining access to the justice system or legal services due to linguistic or cultural barriers. The goal of the fellowship is to use systemic advocacy and other strategies to address pervasive problems of racial injustice. The Racial Justice Fellowship funds two two-year positions at legal aid organizations in Massachusetts.

“Even though she is just beginning her legal career, Claribel Morales has already demonstrated her strong commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable people among us can live in safe housing. Her work is so needed during the COVID-19 crisis, when many people are at risk of losing their homes.”

Lynne Parker, MLAC Executive Director

Claribel Morales, Bart Gordon fellow and Community Legal Aid attorney, assists tenants throughout Western Massachusetts facing homelessness or denied the housing of their choice for discriminatory reasons. A 2019 graduate of Western New England University School of Law, Morales joined Community Legal Aid in the summer of 2019 as an AmeriCorps Legal Advocate serving in the organization’s Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime and Housing Units. While attending law school, she interned at the Mass. Fair Housing Center in Holyoke, Massachusetts and the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities in Hartford, Connecticut. She also participated in the Legal Services Clinic, a partnership between Western New England University Law School and Community Legal Aid, where she assisted tenants with eviction cases in the Western Housing Court.

MLAC Board and Staff

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Timothy Lee*
Computer consultant, Framingham

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Mary Jeanne Stone
Sole practitioner, Law Office of Mary Jeanne Stone, Fall River

Geoffrey Wilson
Retired Presiding Justice of the Franklin County Probate and Family Court

Alma Woodberry
Community advocate, Brockton

* Tim Lee passed away in July 2021. He was a lifelong learner, humanist, and advocate for mental health.

Staff

Lynne Parker
Executive Director

Tenzin Bayul
Executive Support and Organizational Development Manager

Laura Booth
Director, Equal Justice Coalition

Grace Coughlin
Legislative Campaign Associate

Michelle Deakin
Director of Communications

Danielle Hines-Graham
Operations Manager

Carolyn Goodwin
Director, Access to Justice Commission

Tobey Johnson
Director of Information Technology

Diane Lahey
CELHP Grants Administrator

Freddy Matute
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Azim Mazagonwalla
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Martha Rogers
Data Associate

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Support and Training Specialist

Jacqueline Sullivan
Technology Support Analyst

Patricia Swaney
Director of Program Monitoring and Evaluation

Tonysha Taylor
Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
### MLAC Fiscal Year 2021 Grants: $44,406,740

**STATEWIDE ORGANIZATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>General Support</th>
<th>Other Grant</th>
<th>Technology Grant</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td>Prisoners' Legal Services</td>
<td>General Support</td>
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<td>Disability Law Center</td>
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<td>Special Projects</td>
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<td>Massachusetts Advocates for Children</td>
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<td>South Coastal Counties Legal Services</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td>$1,297,454</td>
<td>Victims of Crime Act Funding</td>
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**COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>General Support</th>
<th>COVID Eviction Legal Help Project</th>
<th>Immigrants' Rights Funding</th>
<th>Fellowship</th>
<th>Technology</th>
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<td>Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund</td>
<td>Brazilian Worker Center</td>
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<td>Essex County Community Organization</td>
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<td>Immigrant Family Services Institute</td>
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<td>La Colaborativa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Massachusetts Immigration Legal Assistance Fund</td>
<td>Health Law Advocates</td>
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<td>$4,477,372</td>
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**GUIDE TO TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

- General Support funds are from the state appropriation.
- Special Projects
  - Disability Benefits Project—$1,178,892 to eight organizations
  - Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project—$2,437,265 to seven organizations
  - Medicare Advocacy Project—$446,980 to three organizations
  - Victims of Crime Act Funding is from a federal grant through the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance.
  - Immigrants' Rights Funding is from private foundations and the City of Boston. MLAC administers two immigrant rights funds: The Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund (GBIDF) and the Massachusetts Immigration Legal Assistance Fund (MILAF).
  - COVID Eviction Legal Help Project funding is from a grant through the Department of Housing and Community Development.
Activities & Changes in Net Assets

**REVENUE**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Commonwealth of Massachusetts contract</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID Eviction Legal Help Project (CELHP) grant</td>
<td>$8,082,899</td>
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<tr>
<td>Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance (MOVA) grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts</td>
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<td>Opt-out bar registration fees award</td>
<td>$918,705</td>
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<td>Cy pres award</td>
<td>$360,087</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro hac vice fees award</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management fees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest and other income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net assets released from purpose restrictions</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL REVENUE</strong></td>
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**EXPENSES**

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Program Services</th>
<th>General and Administrative</th>
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<td>$1,806,080</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
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<td>Payroll taxes and fringe benefits</td>
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<td><strong>Total Personnel and Related Costs</strong></td>
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<td>Grants and Contracts Awarded</td>
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<td>Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance (MOVA) grant</td>
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<td>Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project</td>
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<td>Disability Benefits Project</td>
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<td>$1,178,892</td>
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<td>Immigration Grant Funding</td>
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<td>Fellowships Awarded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Grants (Farmworkers, Website and Technology)</td>
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<td>$860,722</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicare Advocacy Project</td>
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<td><strong>Total Grants and Contracts Awarded</strong></td>
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<td><strong>$44,406,740</strong></td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Professional Services</td>
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<td>Other Support Services</td>
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<td>Depreciation</td>
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<td>Travel</td>
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</table>

MLAC directs all of its state-appropriated funds for general support, the Disability Benefits Project, the Medicare Advocacy Project, and the Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project.

“"The response of MLAC and civil legal aid organizations during this time of unprecedented need has been extraordinary, rising to meet an enormous challenge to deliver access to justice during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Lynne Parker, Executive Director
Mala Rafik, Chair, Board of Directors