

# Civil Legal Aid for Children



Line Item 0321-1600

Legal aid is a lifeline for children and their families who need help asserting their rights, including the right to have equal access to public education. The lingering effects of the COVID-19 crisis have had a disproportionately negative impact on children, causing many to fall behind in school. This increased demand for help with special education, remedial programs, behavioral interventions, and other supportive services.

## Legal aid helps children and families facing civil legal issues related to:

- Access to equal education and equal opportunity regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, language, or disability
- Trauma that affects a child's ability to succeed in school
- Guardianship, custody, domestic violence, and other family law issues
- Public benefits for families, including: SNAP, disability benefits, emergency assistance, and access to health care
- Immigration, family separation, and asylum

People and families with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$37,500 per year for a family of four; \$18,225 for an individual) qualify for civil legal aid.

## \$126 million

in economic benefits provided by legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including

## \$3.2 million

in total lifetime child support secured through legal advocacy

## Legal Aid in FY22:

**2,000** children benefitted from the direct representation of legal aid lawyers. *Thousands more benefitted from services provided to family members.*

**9%** of legal aid clients were under 18 years old.



**Danny\*** is a five-year-old boy diagnosed with autism and a language disorder. When his mother, Kim, met with his school district to request an evaluation for special education services, the district refused to accept Danny's diagnosis of autism and only offered speech services once a week.

A legal aid attorney from **Massachusetts Advocates for Children** helped Kim secure an independent evaluation.

The resulting report, combined with the attorney's steadfast advocacy, led the district to agree to provide specially designed instruction within an inclusive classroom to meet all of Danny's unique needs as a student with autism.

\*Name changed for privacy