Funding the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation: $51 Million for Civil Legal Aid in FY27

MLAC
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

Line Item 0321-1600

FY27 Governor's Recommendation: $52 Million | FY27 House of Representatives Recommendation: $52 million | FY27 Senate Recommendation: $51 Million | FY25 Conference Committee Recommendation: $51 Million | FY26 Appropriation: $51 Million

CIVIL LEGAL AID IS A LIFELINE FOR MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS IN CRISIS.

Civil legal aid organizations provide essential services that help people with low incomes meet their critical needs related to domestic safety, housing, employment, health care, and more. People with low incomes are hurting. With a weakened economy and deep federal program cuts, our neighbors will need civil legal aid now more than ever.

Investments in civil legal aid reduce the number of people turned away from needed representation due to lack of program resources. Thanks to leadership in all three branches of government, progress has been made since the years when 60% of eligible people were turned away. Now, over 40% are still turned away from the legal help they need. Continued investment in civil legal aid will help more people address serious legal problems when they need it most.

In FY27, $51 million will help MLAC-funded civil legal aid organizations increase support for proven programs, serve more people and families facing serious legal issues, and stabilize legal aid staffing capacity.

Households with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty line ($41,250 annually for a family of four or $19,950 for an individual in 2026) qualify to receive civil legal services.

The percentage of Massachusetts residents living in what is defined as "extreme poverty" (incomes below 50% of the federal poverty line; $16,500 annually for a family of four or $7,980 for an individual in 2026) is increasing. According to the latest census data, nearly 336,000 people in our state live in extreme poverty – that's 39% of the population already eligible for civil legal aid.

A SOUND INVESTMENT

In FY25, civil legal aid organizations secured an estimated $113.5 million in economic benefits for the Commonwealth and its residents, an increase of $4.5 million over FY24 ($109 million).

Additionally, in FY25 legal aid organizations won estimated lifetime child support benefits exceeding $6.8 million and estimated lifetime Social Security benefits (Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, Retirement, and Dependent benefits) of $11.4 million.

A RANGE OF SERVICES

- Domestic violence
- Education
- Elder law issues
- Employment
- Family law
- Health care
- Housing
- Immigration
- Income maintenance
- Taxes
- Veterans health care
- and more

MLAC AT A GLANCE

MLAC is the largest funder of civil legal aid in the Commonwealth

MLAC distributes state-appropriated funding to civil legal aid organizations across Massachusetts and provides supportive services in the areas of information technology; data and research; program evaluation; engagement and culture; grants; and communications.

MLAC also partners with civil 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 play an important role in delivering on the promise of "equal justice for all," a credo enshrined in our federal and state constitutions. They provide advice and representation to people with low incomes who need help with legal issues that pose serious threats to their well-being and stability. Without civil legal aid, people who cannot afford a private attorney must navigate a complex court system alone—with potentially dire consequences.

CLIENT STORY

Protecting Home and Family

Mary (named changed for privacy), like many older adults with limited income, kept her daily struggles hidden from even her closest friends and family. She knew she was behind on her property tax payments but didn't know how dire the situation had become. She was also dealing with depression and a disability that inhibited her ability to work. At 65, she relied on Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income for all her expenses.

Mary mentioned her financial issues to a friend who told her to contact MetroWest Legal Services (MWLS). There, Mary found an attorney who specializes in assisting older adults. The attorney reviewed Mary's legal documents, confirming she was at imminent risk of losing her home due to the unpaid taxes. In fact, Mary had just two more days to prevent her case from moving forward to foreclosure proceedings.

Mary's MWLS attorney took immediate action to prevent foreclosure and began working with an attorney for the city to secure a payoff amount and payment options for the tax liability. Also, Mary's daughter and son-in-law moved in with her and contributed financially. Through this assistance and plan, Mary was able to pay off the taxes she owed and establish a secure path forward.

Without help from MWLS, Mary would most likely have lost her home and spiraled into deeper poor health and depression. Thanks to legal aid, Mary no longer has to worry about losing the house she is proud to own.

IN FY25:

Over 98,900
people benefited from civil legal aid in Massachusetts

94%
of cities and towns in Massachusetts had at least one resident assisted by civil legal aid

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