Report to the Governor and General Court

FY26

MLAC
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

Introduction

In FY26, civil legal aid organizations across Massachusetts solved critical problems for people seeking safety, shelter, economic opportunity, and financial security. Through this work, MLAC grantees made clients, families, and entire communities stronger.

MLAC received $51 million from the Massachusetts Legislature in FY26 to fund civil legal aid through state budget line item 0321-1600. MLAC also received money from Interest on Lawyers' Trust Account (IOLTA) funds, government grants, and private foundations. Altogether, MLAC distributed $75,452,066 in grants to 20 legal aid organizations across Massachusetts.

Civil legal aid protects people's rights in the areas of housing, employment, family matters (including domestic violence and custody arrangements), access to healthcare and benefits (including veterans' benefits), taxes, consumer issues, education, and more.

In FY26, legal aid attorneys and staff helped more than 104,100 people by handling more than 47,600 civil legal cases.

Households with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level qualify for legal aid. In 2026, that is $41,250 annually for a family of four and $19,950 for an individual.

A positive outcome from one resolved case can have an extensive ripple effect. When people get help resolving serious life problems, the returns are concrete and measurable. Civil legal aid reduces reliance on government services and saves downstream costs in housing, healthcare, public benefits, criminal system involvement, and the courts. Investing in this work is cost-effective for the state of Massachusetts and can be transformative for its people.

Thank you for supporting the work of Massachusetts civil legal aid organizations, which play an essential role in our state's network of safety net programs. Please enjoy this detailed report on their successes and achievements in FY26.

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MLAC Basics and Background

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) is the largest funding source for civil legal aid organizations in Massachusetts. MLAC was established by the Commonwealth in 1983 to ensure that people with low incomes facing critical, non-criminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice, and representation.

MLAC's mission is to provide leadership and support to improve civil legal services to people with low incomes through collaboration with the legal services community, the public, the private bar, and the legislature.

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

In FY26, MLAC received revenue from several sources:

- A state appropriation of $51 million for General Support and $2.5 million for the Access to Counsel Program (ATCP)
- IOLTA program and related funds of more than $21 million
- Grants and other revenue totaling $75,468,104 million

MLAC awarded a total of $75,452,066 in FY26.

In addition to funding, MLAC also provides these organizations with support in communications; data and research; engagement and culture; information technology; and program monitoring and evaluation. Detailed financial information, descriptions of the organizations funded, and MLAC's support services to legal aid organizations appear on the following pages.

About Civil Legal Aid

Civil legal aid organizations provide free information, advice, and representation to people with low incomes who otherwise would not receive help with serious legal issues related to housing, health care, immigration, employment, education, family law (including domestic violence), disability, consumer benefits, elder issues and more. ***To be eligible for MLAC-funded legal services in FY26, a household needed to have an annual income at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level; in 2026, that equates to $19,950 for an individual and $41,250 for a family of four.***

Although the U.S. Constitution and the Massachusetts Constitution guarantee most criminal defendants a right to counsel, most people in civil cases do not have that right. That's true 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 access to a lawyer and equal access to justice.

Cases and Clients: FY26

Total cases handled by MLAC-funded organizations: **47,608**
Number of people benefited: **104,119**

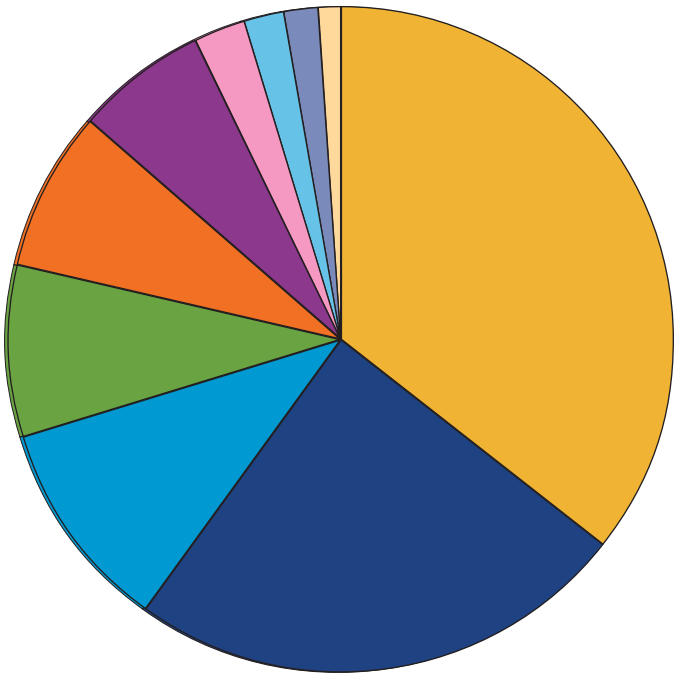
Cases handled by the **Disability Benefits Project: 502**
These cases secure federal Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance benefits for older residents and those with long-term disabilities.

Cases handled by the **Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project: 1,106**
These cases address physical safety, child custody and support, and health care coverage.

Cases handled by the **Medicare Advocacy Project: 140**
These cases assist seniors and people with disabilities.

Case Types

CASES CLOSED FY26

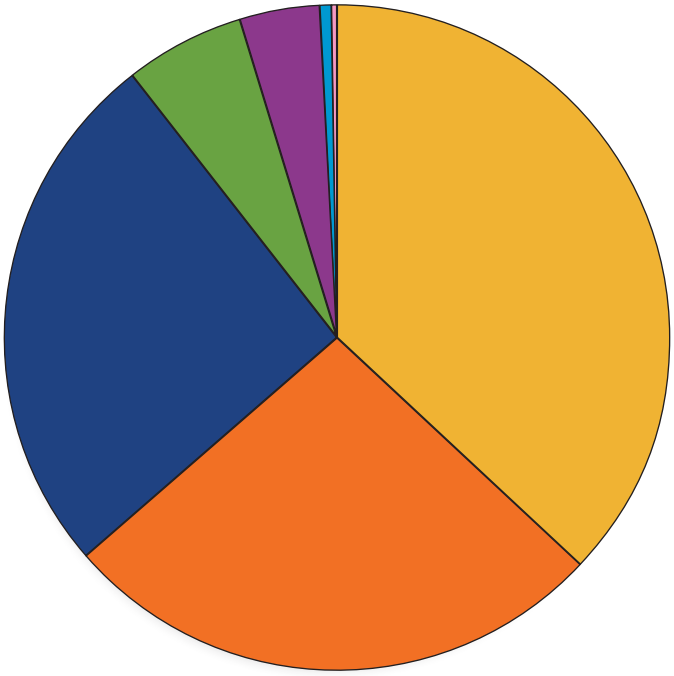


- **36%** Housing
- **24%** Individual Rights (including immigration,disability rights, human trafficking, and more)
- **10%** Family
- **9%** Income Maintenance
- **8%** Consumer
- **6%** Education
- **3%** Employment
- **2%** Miscellaneous
- **1%** Health
- **1%** Juvenile

Client Demographics

Race

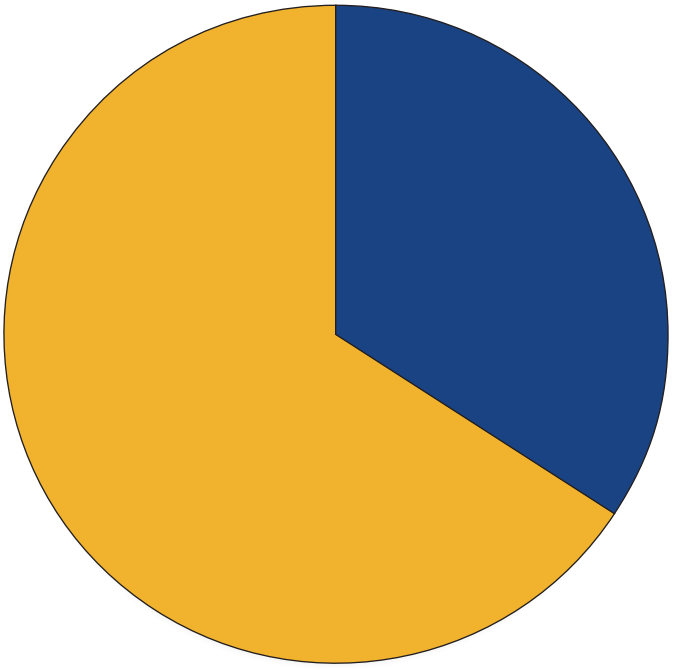
CASES CLOSED FY26



- **37%** White Not Hispanic
- **29%** Black Not Hispanic
- **26%** Other Race
- **4%** Multiple Race
- **4%** Asian
- **0%** Native American
- **0%** Hawaiian Pacific Islander

Ethnicity

CASES CLOSED FY26

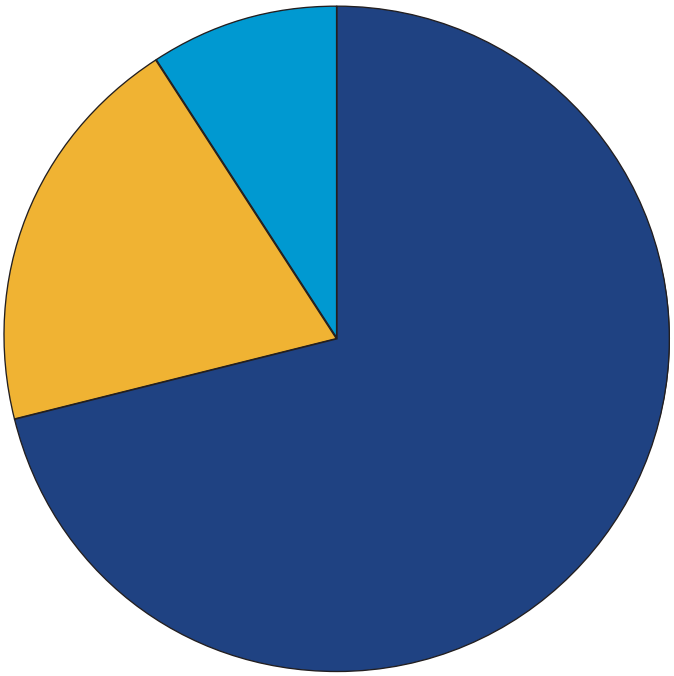


- **66%** Not Hispanic
- **34%** Hispanic

Client Demographics

Age Range

CASES CLOSED FY26



- **71%** 18–59
- **20%** 60 and over
- **9%** Under 18

Serving all of Massachusetts

97% of Massachusetts cities and towns had at least one person with a case handled by a civil legal aid organization

71% of Massachusetts cities and towns had at least 10 people with a case handled by a civil legal aid organization

The few towns that did not have a single person helped by civil legal aid in FY26 are among the least populous in Massachusetts.

Legal Aid Staff

484 Attorneys

134 Paralegals

These numbers represent full-time equivalents (FTEs).

Pro Bono Attorneys

2,459 private bar pro bono attorneys collectively accepted **2,430** cases through legal aid organizations on behalf of residents with low incomes, providing **42,448** hours of pro bono work worth **$9,550,708.**

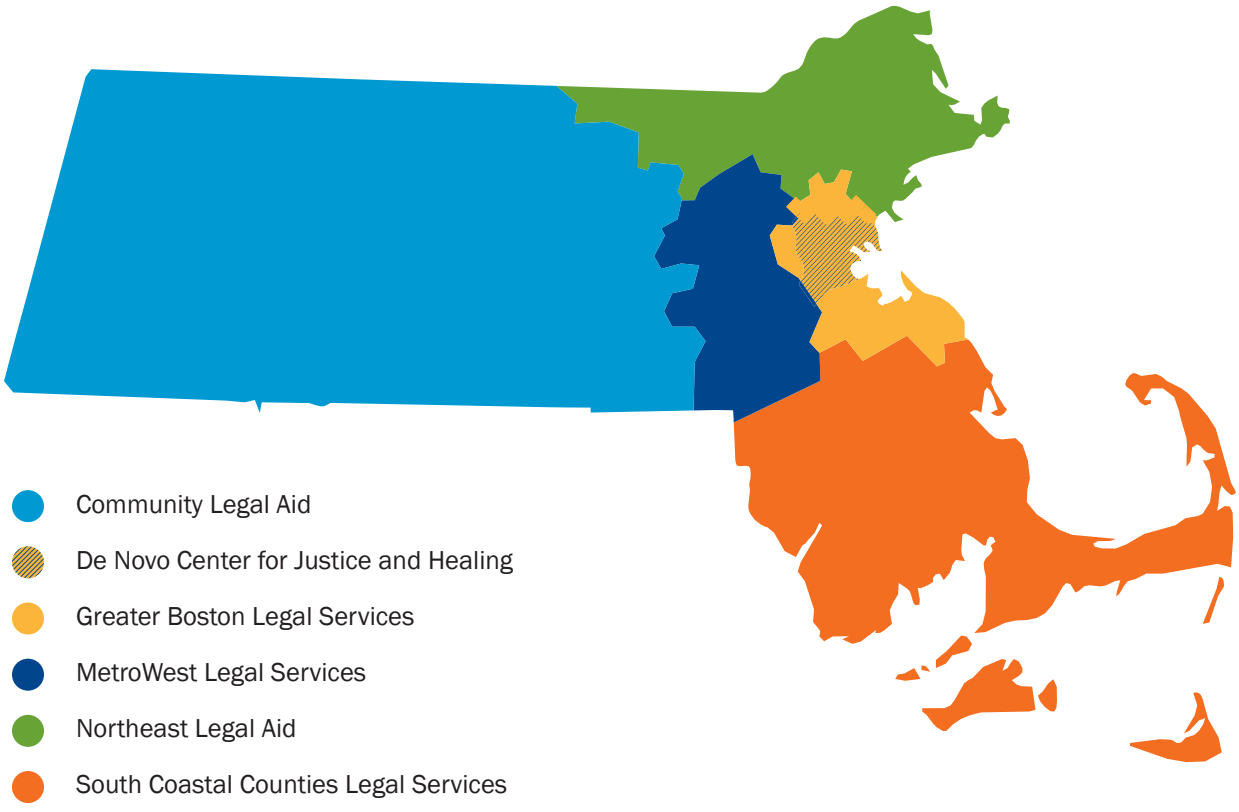
Legal Aid Organizations MLAC Funds

MLAC uses state-appropriated funds (under line item 0321-1600) to support two different types of civil legal aid organizations: regional and statewide.

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Regional organizations help people from a particular geographic area resolve a variety of civil legal problems related to housing, health care, unemployment insurance, public benefits, immigration, domestic violence, and other serious issues.

- **Community Legal Aid,** with offices in Worcester, Northampton, Pittsfield, Springfield, and Fitchburg, serves Central and Western Massachusetts.
- **De Novo Center for Justice and Healing,** based in Cambridge, serves Boston, Cambridge, and surrounding areas.
- **Greater Boston Legal Services,** with offices in Boston and Cambridge, serves the Greater Boston area.
- **MetroWest Legal Services,** based in Framingham, serves the MetroWest region.
- **Northeast Legal Aid,** with offices in Lawrence, Lowell, and Lynn, serves Essex and Northern Middlesex Counties.
- **South Coastal Counties Legal Services,** with offices in New Bedford, Fall River, Brockton, and Hyannis, serves Cape Cod, the Islands, and Southeastern Massachusetts.



STATEWIDE ORGANIZATIONS

Statewide organizations specialize in specific subjects or types of law and serve people across the Commonwealth. They also provide support to regional organizations.

- **Center for Law and Education** provides expertise on education-related cases.
- **Center for Public Representation** is dedicated to enforcing and expanding 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 across Massachusetts.
- **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 people with low incomes and their communities.
- **National Consumer Law Center** advises on a variety of 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 in Massachusetts.
- **Veterans Legal Services** promotes the self-sufficiency, stability, and financial security of veterans with low incomes and those who are unhoused.

Special Initiatives

Access to Counsel Program

The Access to Counsel Program (ATCP), administered by MLAC, provides full legal representation for tenants and owner-occupants with low incomes in eviction proceedings. In FY26, ATCP was included as a line item in the state budget (0321-1800) and funded at $2.5 million. ATCP also recieved $108,500 in funding from the Massachusetts Bar Foundation and $347,808 from the IOLTA program in FY26.

Eight MLAC grantees provide ATCP services.

Six grantees represented tenants:

- 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

One grantee represented landlords:

Volunteer Lawyers Project represented low-income owner-occupant landlords. Massachusetts Law Reform Institute assisted MLAC with implementation, outreach, and training.

Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime

The Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime (CLAVC) initiative helps victims of crime throughout Massachusetts with their related civil legal problems, including family law, housing, child welfare, education, consumer issues, public benefits, and more. Crime victims often experience difficult legal problems that cannot be addressed in the criminal law system. For example, a victim of an assault may be unable to work, leading to financial distress, eviction, and/or debt problems. Jane Doe, Inc. and the National Consumer Law Center provide CLAVC training and support. MLAC and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute provide training, support, and overall project coordination. In FY26, CLAVC awarded $2,323,435 to ten civil legal aid organizations.

Organizations that received CLAVC funds:

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts

Community Legal Aid

De Novo Center for Justice and Healing

Disability Law Center

Greater Boston Legal Services

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

MetroWest Legal Services

Northeast Legal Aid

South Coastal Counties Legal Services

Victim Rights Law Center

Strengthening the Legal Aid Network

In addition to operating funds, MLAC provides supportive services to its grantees in the following areas:

Central Technology Project

MLAC's Central Technology Project enhances the effectiveness of legal aid organizations by streamlining and standardizing their technology infrastructure, providing network security and cyber resilience using the latest Security Operations Center technologies. The Technology team delivers Help Desk support for end users while also managing mission-critical infrastructure. The team identifies and evaluates innovative technologies designed to secure and protect client and program data, including ongoing Security Awareness Training.

Communications

MLAC's Communications team advances organizational priorities through strategic messaging and content development. The team manages MLAC's website and social media platforms to raise awareness of civil legal aid and educate the public. It also supports MLAC grantees by convening regular communications meetings and producing a quarterly e-newsletter.

Data and Analysis

MLAC's Data team leverages advanced tools and analytics to inform decision-making across MLAC, its grantees, and its funding partners. By gathering and analyzing data on funded legal aid organizations, the clients they serve, and the broader low-income population in Massachusetts, the team provides critical insights that guide strategy and improve outcomes. Throughout its work, the Data team is committed to transparency, accuracy, and building trust.

Engagement and Culture

Improves services to legal aid clients by building cultural competence among staff as well as promoting equality, inclusion and engagement within MLAC and the civil legal aid organizations it funds. Through education and professional development, improved hiring practices, statewide events, and collaboration, this initiative strengthens workplace culture and programmatic leadership and spurs legal aid organizations to exemplify shared values of justice and fairness.

Grants

MLAC's Grants team oversees the full lifecycle of funding, managing both incoming and outgoing grants. The team administers an online Grants Portal that supports applications, contracting, budgeting, and reporting. Through ongoing monitoring and technical assistance, the Grants team works closely with grantees to ensure

compliance with state and federal requirements, as well as MLAC policies.

Program Evaluation

MLAC regularly evaluates its grantees through a comprehensive peer review process that draws on the expertise of attorneys and professionals experienced in organizational development and civil legal aid delivery. These assessments are guided by performance standards established by the American Bar Association for the delivery of civil legal services.

Access to Justice

MLAC employs the Director of the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission. The Commission was created in 2005 by order of the Supreme Judicial Court to provide leadership, vision, and coordination for the many organizations dedicated to improving access to justice for all persons in the Commonwealth who are unable to afford counsel for their essential civil legal needs.

Equal Justice Coalition

The Equal Justice Coalition is a partnership of the Massachusetts Bar Association, the Boston Bar Association and MLAC. The EJC advocates for expanded access to civil legal aid for residents with low incomes across Massachusetts. Its membership includes bar associations, law firms, law schools, and other legal professionals who advocate for sustained and increased state funding for civil legal aid. The coalition conducts year-round legislative advocacy and hosts its annual “Walk to the Hil” each January.

Client Story

Creating Opportunities for Children to Thrive

For two years, Jen Fowler's son Dante was denied the special education services he needed, preventing him from learning alongside his peers and being able to fully participate in his school community. When Jen connected with the Children's Law Center of Massachusetts, she found an advocate who could help her navigate the system and fight for the support Dante deserved.

Jen described the experience as feeling like "winning the lottery."

"My son is now in a special education school. He is thriving, and after two years of not being able to celebrate his birthday with peers, this October he celebrated his 13th birthday with his peers and his friends," Jen said.

For Jen and Dante, legal assistance meant far more than resolving a dispute with a school. It meant access to an education, a sense of belonging, and the opportunity to experience important moments of childhood alongside friends. Jen's story is a powerful reminder of what is possible when families have access to legal services—and of what can be at stake when they do not.

Jen Fowler at the 2026 "Walk to the Hill"
Photo credit: Jenna Joyce Photography

"My son has a bright future ahead of him again because of this help, a future he was and is entitled to."

Jen Fowler

Activities & Changes in Net Assets

FY26 Revenue

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Appropriation for General Support	$51,000,000
Commonwealth of Massachusetts Appropriation for Access to Counsel Program	$2,500,000
Massachusetts IOLTA Committee	
Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts	$19,982,878
Program Opt-Out Bar Registration Fees	$760,786
Cy Pres Awards	$174,831
Pro Hac Vice Fees	$281,156
Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance	$2,822,400
Interest and Other Income	$1,303,215
TOTAL	**$78,825,266**

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

Net Assets

Beginning of Year: July 1, 2025	End of Year: June 30, 2026
$20,427,883	$18,285,655

FY26 Expenses

	Program and Services	General and Administrative	Total
Personnel and Related Costs			
Salaries	$1,183,596	$1,438,074	$2,621,670
Payroll taxes and fringe benefits	$330,825	$379,450	$710,275
Total Personnel and Related Costs	**$1,514,421**	**$1,817,524**	**$3,331,945**
Grants and Contracts Awarded			
General Support Funding	$62,629,744	—	$62,629,744
Access to Counsel Project	$2,856,308	—	$2,856,308
Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance	$2,703,134	—	$2,703,134
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	$2,454,392	—	$2,454,392
Disability Benefits Project	$1,178,890	—	$1,178,890
Medicare Advocacy Project	$1,128,000	—	$1,128,000
Forgivable Loan Disbursements	$157,131	—	$157,131
Other Grants	$1,227,280	—	$1,227,280
Fellowships	$1,133,225		$1,133,225
Total Grants and Contracts Awarded	**$75,468,104**	**—**	**$75,468,104**
Other			
Professional Services	$975,103	$464,955	$1,440,058
Occupancy	$159,760	$449,872	$609,632
Other Support Services	$509,371	$54,650	$564,021
Office and Other	$9,989	$57,147	$67,136
Travel	$8,525	$1,405	$9,930
Total Other	**$1,662,748**	**$1,028,029**	**$2,690,777**
TOTAL EXPENSES	**$78,645,273**	**$2,845,553**	**$81,490,826**

MLAC Fiscal Year 2026 Grants: $75,452,066

Regional Organizations

Community Legal Aid	
General Support	$14,443,944
Access to Counsel Program	$603,750
Fellowships (Including Language Access Fellowship)	$70,000
Farmworkers Project	$75,000
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$519,712
Disability Benefits Project	$286,592
Medicare Advocacy Project	$395,611
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	$677,027
TOTAL	**$17,071,636**

De Novo Center for Justice and Healing	
General Support	$367,800
Access to Counsel Program	$409,614
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$138,884
Disability Benefits Project	$7,298
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	$17,240
TOTAL	**$940,836**

Greater Boston Legal Services	
General Support	$15,334,781
Technology	$131,552
Access to Counsel Program	$557,750
Fellowships (Including Language Access Fellowship)	$780,000
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$479,412
Disability Benefits Project	$304,266
Medicare Advocacy Project	$321,370
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	$718,783
TOTAL	**$18,627,915**

MetroWest Legal Services	
General Support	$2,822,404
Technology	$22,866
Access to Counsel Program	$219,855
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$116,606
Disability Benefits Project	$56,001
Medicare Advocacy Project	$57,763
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	$132,294
TOTAL	**$3,427,790**

Northeast Legal Aid	
General Support	$7,800,673
Access to Counsel Program	$575,000
Fellowships (Including Language Access Fellowship)	$70,318
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$327,247
Disability Benefits Project	$159,777
Medicare Advocacy Project	$164,806
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	$377,448
TOTAL	**$9,475,269**

South Coastal Counties Legal Services	
General Support	$9,207,940
Access to Counsel Program	$241,500
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$354,023
Disability Benefits Project	$182,700
Medicare Advocacy Project	$188,450
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	$431,600
TOTAL	**$10,606,213**

Statewide Organizations

Center for Law and Education	
General Support	$578,168
Technology	$5,141
Fellowships (Including Language Access Fellowship)	$100,000
Technical Assistance	$25,000
TOTAL	**$708,309**

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts	
General Support	$699,404
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$121,455
TOTAL	**$820,859**

Center for Public Representation	
General Support	$840,040
Technology	$7,236
TOTAL	**$847,276**

Disability Law Center	
General Support	$1,156,332
Technology	$8,639
Fellowships (Including Language Access Fellowship)	$70,000
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$67,091
Disability Benefits Project	$182,256
TOTAL	**$1,484,318**

Massachsuetts Advocates for Children	
General Support	$456,751
TOTAL	**$456,751**

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute	
General Support	$6,937,987
Technology	$64,472
Access to Counsel Program	$69,000
Fellowships (Including Language Access Fellowship)	$100,000
Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime Initiative	$199,005
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	$100,000
Websites Project	$740,811
TOTAL	**$8,211,275**

National Consumer Law Center	
General Support	$494,140
TOTAL	**$494,140**

PAIR Project	
General Support	$447,448
Technology	$2,504
TOTAL	**$449,952**

Prisoners' Legal Services	
General Support	$751,616
Fellowships (Including Language Access Fellowship)	$42,907
Technical Assistance	$25,000
TOTAL	**$819,523**

Veterans Legal Services	
General Support	$447,448
Technology	$3,018
TOTAL	**$450,466**

Community Organizations and Other Programs

Victims of Crime Act Funding	
Victim Rights Law Center	$379,699
TOTAL	$379,699

Access to Counsel Program	
Volunteer Lawyers Project	$179,839
TOTAL	$179,839

GUIDE TO TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

General Support
Funds are from the state appropriation.

Special Projects
Funds are from the state appropriation.
- Disability Benefits Project
- Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project
- Medicare Advocacy Project

Civil Legal Aid to Victims of Crime Initiative
Funds are from grants through the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance.

MLAC Board and Staff

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