



February 18, 2015

The Honorable Senator Stanley C. Rosenberg
President of the Senate
State House, Suite 333
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Senate President Rosenberg:

On behalf of the Equal Justice Coalition (EJC), I would like to thank you for your leadership as President of the Massachusetts Senate. Your commitment to making Massachusetts government more accessible and responsive to constituents is made evident through your Commonwealth Conversations tour. As you know, the EJC was created by the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), Boston Bar Association (BBA), and Massachusetts Bar Association (MBA) to advocate for funding for civil legal aid in Massachusetts. Your strong and consistent support in the FY15 budget campaign was critical in helping us secure \$15 million for MLAC, for which we are profoundly grateful. As you prepare for the upcoming budget process, we look forward to working with you to continue to expand access to justice for the state's poorest residents.

I know you are aware of "Investing in Justice," a recently released report by the BBA Task Force to Expand Civil Legal Aid in Massachusetts, which found that there is a growing "justice gap" in Massachusetts that disproportionately affects our most vulnerable residents. Currently, approximately one million Massachusetts residents are living at or below 125% of the federal poverty line (\$30,313 per year or \$583 per week, for a family of four). Yet, the report also found that, **due to a lack of resources, legal aid programs are forced to turn away as many as two-thirds of the eligible applicants who come to them seeking assistance.** However, the Task Force report also found that **for each additional dollar spent on civil legal aid funding, the state saves between two and five dollars on emergency services such as housing for the poor, medical care for victims of domestic violence, or recovered federal benefits, among others.**

Increasing funding for civil legal aid is therefore a smart investment that benefits not only your most vulnerable constituents, but also all taxpayers in the Commonwealth. As you and your colleagues in the Senate search for savings in the upcoming budget during a time of revenue shortfall, we encourage you to consider the many social and economic benefits of investing in civil legal aid and, in particular, the tremendous impact it would have on rebalancing the state budget.

In line with the Task Force report's recommendation, the EJC is proud to support MLAC's request for \$25 million in funding for civil legal aid in FY16. **I strongly urge you to join us in supporting that request, and to make it a top priority of yours throughout the budget process.** If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (617) 523-8300, Meehan, Boyle, Black & Bogdanow, P.C. or the EJC Director, Deb Silva, at (617) 391-5633 or dsilva@equaljusticecoalition.org. We look forward to continuing to work with you throughout your new term to support equal justice for all in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Carroll".

John Carroll
Chair, Equal Justice Coalition
Meehan, Boyle, Black & Bogdanow, P.C.

The Equal Justice Coalition

John Carroll, Chair • Deborah Silva, Director

7 Winthrop Square, 2nd Floor • Boston, MA 02110 • www.equaljusticecoalition.org

- Boston Bar Association
- Massachusetts Bar Association
- Asian American Lawyers Association of Massachusetts
- Bar Association of Norfolk County
- Barnstable County Bar Association
- Berkshire County Bar Association
- Bristol County Bar Association
- Dukes County Bar Association
- Essex County Bar Association
- Franklin County Bar Association
- Greater Lynn Bar Association
- Hampden County Bar Association
- Hellenic Bar Association Of Massachusetts
- Justitia Law Society Of Massachusetts
- Lawrence Bar Association
- Massachusetts Academy of Trial Attorneys
- Massachusetts Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
- Massachusetts Association of Hispanic Attorneys
- Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association
- Massachusetts Defense Lawyers Association
- Massachusetts Employment Lawyers Association
- Massachusetts Juvenile Bar Association
- Massachusetts LGBTQ Bar Association
- Middlesex County Bar Association
- Nantucket County Bar Association
- National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
- National Lawyers Guild
- Plymouth County Bar Association
- Real Estate Bar Association for Massachusetts
- South Asian Bar Association Of Greater Boston
- Women's Bar Association
- Worcester County Bar Association