



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

Justinian 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

February 4, 2015

The Honorable Charles D. Baker, Jr.
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 360
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Governor Baker:

On behalf of the Equal Justice Coalition (EJC), a collaboration of bar associations and private attorneys committed to equal justice for all, I am writing to ask you to include \$25 million in funding for civil legal aid in your FY16 budget recommendation. By providing general support funding for civil legal aid through the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), line item 0321-1600, you will ensure that more low-income residents of the Commonwealth can gain meaningful access to the civil legal system while bringing long-range benefits and savings to the state and its economy. As the new Governor of the Commonwealth, you are uniquely positioned to take a strong stance as a champion of our state's most vulnerable residents by demonstrating your support for civil legal aid.

Legal advice and representation is prohibitively expensive for those who need it most. Civil legal aid programs funded by MLAC assist clients with critical legal issues on a daily basis. Such representation uses the law to protect some of the clients' most fundamental rights: the rights to housing and food, the right to be fairly paid for their work, the right to healthcare and more. Civil legal aid can keep families together; prevent low-income residents from spiraling further into poverty due to accidents or unanticipated expenses; prevent homelessness and protect men, women and children from domestic violence and other forms of abuse. By helping ensure that clients' basic human needs are met, civil legal aid serves as a bulwark against poverty and a powerful voice for the rights of the voiceless.

For each family that loses its home and must seek emergency shelter, each veteran or disabled person who is denied federal benefits and each domestic violence survivor who sustains injuries because he or she is unable to leave an abusive partner, the state loses a significant amount of money in addition to the human cost of the injustice. Rather than serving as a reactive response to these problems, funding civil legal aid can prevent such damages in the first place. **As the recently released report of Boston Bar Association Statewide Task Force to Expand Civil Legal Aid in Massachusetts found, funding civil legal aid generates returns of between \$2 and \$5 for each dollar spent by the state.** A budget increase to MLAC would allow MLAC to provide general support funding to civil legal aid programs throughout the Commonwealth, which, in turn, would allow them to better serve the diverse needs of their clients.

The inability of countless low-income litigants to afford legal counsel is a critical justice issue that threatens the efficiency, legitimacy and fairness of our courts. Each time a litigant must

The Equal Justice Coalition

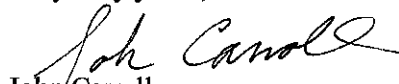
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represent him or herself in court against a represented opponent, this imbalance of power creates a high likelihood that true justice will not be served. Further, *pro se* litigants may slow down the courts by struggling to navigate a highly technical system built on the assumption that those using it have access to trained legal counsel. For thousands of Massachusetts residents this year, this is simply not the case, and our justice system suffers because of it.

Funding civil legal aid is a smart investment for our economy, for our courts and, above all, for the most vulnerable among us. **With this in mind, I urge you to increase funding for MLAC in your FY16 budget recommendation to \$25 million.**

Very truly yours,


John Carroll
Chair, Equal Justice Coalition

CC: Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito
Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants
Steve Kadish, Chief of Staff
Elizabeth Mahoney, Policy Director
Lon Povich, Chief Legal Counsel
Ryan Coleman, Legislative Director
Secretary Kristen Lepore, Executive Office of Administration and Finance
Robert Ross, General Counsel, Executive Office of Administration and Finance