

2 December 2016

His Excellency Charlie Baker
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 280
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Re: Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC, line item #0321-1600)
FY18 Budget Request: \$23 million

Dear Governor Baker,

We write to thank you for supporting increased funding for civil legal aid in Massachusetts in the FY17 budget and to encourage you to do so again in your FY18 budget recommendations. Civil legal aid programs serve a vital role in communities across Massachusetts, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to help bring equal justice to all residents of the Commonwealth. **We urge you to recommend \$23 million in appropriation for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) through line item #0321-1600 in the FY18 state budget.**

As deans of Massachusetts law schools founded on the principle of equal justice under the law, we believe that all people deserve equal access to justice, regardless of their income. Our students and our faculty recognize that civil legal aid is essential to making that principle a reality. Although civil legal aid programs helped more than 88,000 people in FY16 alone, lack of resources forced MLAC-funded programs to turn away nearly two-thirds of eligible people who sought assistance. It is often extremely difficult for vulnerable individuals to protect their rights and access benefits without legal advice and representation, which means that too often families lose their homes unjustly, elders and people suffering from illness do not receive crucial medical care, survivors of domestic violence do not receive assistance and protection, and hardworking parents lose stable employment. The right to an attorney in criminal cases is one of the greatest principles of our society, but we often forget that the results of civil cases can also have catastrophic effects on the lives of low-income people. Greater funding for civil legal aid will help ameliorate this inequity.

Increased appropriation for civil legal aid will also benefit all residents of the Commonwealth by strengthening the economy. According to the Boston Bar Association Statewide Task Force to Expand Civil Legal Aid in Massachusetts 2014 report (<http://www.bostonbar.org/public-policy/civil-legal-aid-in-ma>), the state and its residents save between two and five dollars—in recovered federal benefits and relief on emergency shelters, state agencies, law enforcement, and health care institutions—in return for every dollar invested in civil legal aid. Furthermore, civil legal aid benefits businesses, their employees, and their customers by helping maintain a consistent workforce and safe, stable communities. **Funding civil legal aid gives the state an opportunity to use its resources efficiently while affirming its dedication to the principles enshrined in our constitution.**

The recent political and fiscal climate reawakens us to the urgency of defending our most vulnerable fellow residents—and thus the increased importance of equal protection under the law. Therefore, we strongly urge you to support appropriating \$23 million for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation in the FY18 budget.

Thank you for your leadership and for all of the work that you do in service of the people of Massachusetts. We appreciate your support of equal justice for all.

Very truly yours,



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Massachusetts School of Law



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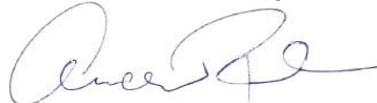
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