

MLAC requests \$5 million increase for civil legal aid in FY18

Line Item 0321-1600

MLAC's appropriation funds general support to civil legal aid programs as well as grants for legal assistance to domestic violence victims and Massachusetts residents eligible for federal disability benefits and Medicare.

FY18 Request: \$23 million | FY17 Appropriation: \$18 million

FY18 Recommendations: Governor - \$18.18 million

- Low-income people with serious civil legal problems are not eligible for court-appointed attorneys. **They rely on civil legal aid programs for legal advice and representation.**
- Civil legal aid protects the safety and stability of low-income individuals and families. It provides critical support in cases related to housing, employment, family law, domestic violence, health care, education, immigration, protection of elders, and more.
- Without civil legal aid, vulnerable Massachusetts residents, including families with young children, elders, and domestic violence survivors, are forced to face the complex legal system alone, with often devastating consequences on the health and welfare of individuals and communities.
- The need for civil legal aid continues to far exceed the resources of civil legal aid programs.



Almost 1 million people in Massachusetts live below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$30,750 a year for a family of four), making them eligible for civil legal aid.



Due to lack of funding, legal aid organizations in Massachusetts are forced to turn away 64 percent of eligible people who seek help.



Civil legal aid is a smart investment for the state; for every dollar invested, at least \$2-\$5 is returned to the state and its residents.

"Working closely with legal aid makes our work stronger and keeps domestic violence survivors safer. We couldn't do what we do without the help and expertise of legal aid."

- Janis Broderick,
Executive Director
Elizabeth Freeman Center
Pittsfield

Strengthening the Social Safety Net

MLAC-funded programs closed 23,255 cases in FY16, assisting over 88,000 low-income people across the state. Beyond direct service to individual clients, civil legal aid programs provide legal information online and through trainings in their communities. These efforts strengthen the work of social service providers, addressing emergent issues and helping prevent and solve civil legal problems for thousands of people before they set foot in a legal aid office. Additional funding for MLAC will expand capacity at civil legal aid programs across the Commonwealth, reaching more people in need and helping create a fairer and more efficient justice system for all people.

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation was established by the state legislature in 1983 to ensure that low-income people with critical, noncriminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice and representation.

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