

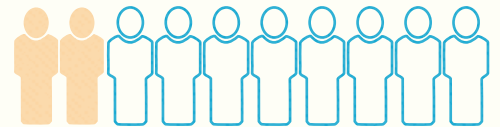
Immigration, Refugees, and Civil Legal Aid



Massachusetts has a long tradition of welcoming all who seek a stable place to live and the opportunity to improve life for themselves and their families. Whether it be defending unaccompanied minors against wrongful deportation, assisting foreign-born residents in accessing housing and education supports, or offering workshops to educate immigrant populations about their rights, civil legal aid programs ensure just and equal treatment for everyone who calls Massachusetts home.

Protecting the Rights of Immigrants

In FY16, MLAC-funded civil legal aid programs closed 1,894 immigration cases. The positive impact of legal aid, however, extends far beyond direct representation. Through “Know Your Rights” workshops, civil legal aid programs also help immigrants and refugees advocate for themselves and maintain safe and stable lives. Since the election in November, legal aid programs have seen a sharp increase in the number of people seeking help with immigration-related issues. This surge is expected to continue as a result of changes in federal immigration policy and increasing media coverage. Without additional resources, civil legal aid programs will be unable to respond to the increased need for services in their communities.



80%
TURNUED AWAY

Legal aid programs in Massachusetts are forced to turn away 80% of eligible residents who seek assistance with immigration matters.

Vital Contributions to Our Communities

- Nearly 500,000 Massachusetts residents are non-citizens, working in the hotel and restaurant industries, education, research, health care, technology, and numerous other fields.
- Immigrants help build and sustain our state’s economy. Immigrants are 30 percent more likely to start their own business than native-born Americans. These new businesses create jobs and spur economic growth.
- As consumers, immigrants boost demand for local goods—with more than \$2 trillion in estimated purchasing power in the US in 2015—and as workers, they guarantee a strong labor force to sustain existing industries.

Civil legal aid is critical to ensuring that immigrants continue to play these vital roles, making the Commonwealth stronger and more prosperous.

Protecting Rights

All residents have a right to due process. Legal assistance helps immigrants and refugees who face a variety of social and legal challenges:

- Changing and sometimes conflicting immigration policies at the national, state, and municipal level can make the law difficult to navigate. Civil legal aid provides information and training to help long-time residents understand their rights and responsibilities, and also provides representation to immigrants in complex legal proceedings.

- Fear of potentially negative interactions with law enforcement, deportation, and loss of housing and other resources often keeps undocumented immigrants who are experiencing domestic violence from reporting the abuse to authorities. Civil legal aid helps survivors get the protections and stability they need.
- Dishonest businesses take advantage of language and cultural barriers to deprive employees of wages, overtime pay, or information on workplace safety regulations. All workers deserve a fair wage and a safe working environment, and legal aid protects these rights.
- After fleeing violence, disaster, or oppression, refugees from around the world seek safety in the United States. Legal aid attorneys can assist refugees in applying for asylum so they can begin new lives in peace in Massachusetts.

A life-or-death decision to leave home

Ana was just 12 years old when she crossed the border into the United States. Having been targeted by gangs in her town in El Salvador, she feared for her life. Her best friend, who had refused to be involved with a gang member, had just disappeared. Ana would later learn that her friend was kidnapped and murdered during the night, her body left in a ravine. Shortly after her friend's murder, Ana was being pressured to become the girlfriend of a gang member. Ana knew her only option for survival was to leave her home and everything she knew.

Abandoned by her mother as an infant, Ana had been raised by her grandparents, but they were aging and struggling with health issues. It took her a month to plan her crossing from El Salvador to Guatemala to Mexico to the U.S., where she was apprehended by immigration officials at the border and detained until she could be released to the custody of a relative in Massachusetts. Because of her age, Ana was assisted by a family law attorney and an immigration attorney at Community Legal Services and Counseling Center, who accompanied her during her interview with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and Immigration court in February 2016, where she was granted legal permanent residence. She is now living with her father in Massachusetts and attending school.