

Walk to the Hill  
2017 Sponsors



27 February 2017

Senate President Stanley Rosenberg  
State House Room 332  
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (line item 0321-1600)  
FY18 budget request of \$23,000,000

Dear President Rosenberg,

On behalf of the Equal Justice Coalition (EJC), I write in support of the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation's (MLAC's) request for a \$5 million increase in funding for civil legal aid (line item 0321-1600). We are grateful for the \$1 million increase the legislature approved for FY17. In his recent budget proposal, Governor Baker took an important first step and recommended a one percent increase in funding for legal aid (\$180,000) for FY18.

As you know, the need for civil legal aid in Massachusetts remains great. Nearly 1 million people in our state live below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$30,750 a year for a family of four) and thus are eligible for legal assistance. According to the Boston Bar Association Statewide Task Force to Expand Civil Legal Aid report (<http://www.bostonbar.org/public-policy/civil-legal-aid-in-ma>), due to insufficient funding, MLAC-funded programs must turn away 64 percent of those who are eligible for and seek legal assistance. Civil legal aid helps families stay in their homes, allows survivors of domestic violence to find safety and stability, ensures that the sick and elderly have access to vital medical treatment, and ensures that immigrants receive due process. **A \$5 million increase in funding will let MLAC-funded civil legal aid programs open at least 4,000 new cases, which would help an estimated 10,300 low-income clients and their family members.**

The Massachusetts legal community understands the crucial role that legal representation plays in determining legal outcomes. On January 26, over 700 attorneys, law students, and advocates encouraged their legislators to support increased funding for MLAC in the FY18 budget at the EJC's Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid. Our budget campaign has been endorsed by dozens of bar associations from across the state, 45 managing partners of Massachusetts law firms, nine deans of Massachusetts law schools, and 104 General Counsel of some of Massachusetts' most successful corporations.

In addition to providing vital support to low-income individuals and families, civil legal aid is also a wise investment for the state. According to MLAC's most recent report on the economic benefits of legal aid (<http://mlac.org/resources/research/>), legal assistance and advocacy for low-income residents resulted total income and savings of over \$49 million for the Commonwealth and its residents in FY16 alone,

The Equal Justice Coalition

Louis Tompros, Chair • Laura Booth, Director

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Bar Association

Massachusetts  
Bar Association

Albanian American Bar Association

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Association of Massachusetts

Attleboro Area Bar Association

Bar Association of Norfolk County

Barnstable County Bar Association

Berkshire County  
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Massachusetts Black Lawyers  
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Attorneys

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Greater Boston

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Worcester County Bar Association

including \$15.9 million in federal revenue entering the Commonwealth; \$12.1 million in cost savings on social services for the state; and \$21.2 million in benefits for residents.

Because of the great benefit it brings to the state and the overwhelming need for legal assistance among our state's most vulnerable residents, we will continue to advocate for MLAC's request for a \$5 million increase—for a total of \$23 million in the FY18 budget—as the budget process continues.

Thank you for your support of civil legal aid, and thank you for all that you do in service of the people of Massachusetts. I look forward to continuing to work with you to improve the lives of low-income people across the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Louis Tompros". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Louis Tompros  
Chair, Equal Justice Coalition