

December 1, 2017

Governor Charles D. Baker, Jr.  
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
State House Room 280  
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Re: Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), line item 0321-1600  
FY19 Budget Request: \$23 million

Dear Governor Baker:

As deans of the Massachusetts law schools, we thank you for supporting efforts to expand access to justice in Massachusetts. Your approval of \$18 million in FY18 funding for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), line item 0321-1600, demonstrates your recognition that access to legal assistance is the bedrock of a functioning society. In light of the vast need for civil legal aid among low-income Massachusetts residents today, we ask that you increase funding for MLAC by \$5 million in your FY19 Budget Recommendations, for a total appropriation of \$23 million.

Equal justice under the law is far from a reality for low-income people. Without access to legal assistance, residents in or on the brink of poverty struggle to navigate the complex legal system, often failing to attain the justice they deserve. Each of our schools instills in students the importance of providing legal assistance to vulnerable communities. Through their classes, clinical experiences and co-ops, our students come to understand that access to legal help is vital to ensuring that individuals maintain stable housing, employment, health care, freedom from domestic abuse, and other essentials.

Students also learn that due to lack of funding for civil legal aid, the majority of poor people with serious legal problems do not receive the help they need. Many graduates of our schools seek to work for legal aid providers or other organizations that assist low-income families, yet sadly, these resource-starved agencies are often unable to hire new lawyers. The result is that legal aid programs in Massachusetts must turn away 65% of the eligible residents that walk through their doors (eligible residents have incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level, or \$30,750 annually for a family of four). This amounts to nearly 45,000 low-income people each year.

More funding for legal aid is the solution. Law school graduates and trained lawyers are eager to do this work, but without adequate resources, legal aid providers will remain significantly understaffed. We urge you to include a \$23 million appropriation for MLAC in your FY19 Budget Recommendations so that we can make progress on alleviating this severe societal problem.

Thank you for your dedicated public service and your commitment to advancing justice.

Very truly yours,



Michael L. Coyne  
Massachusetts School of Law



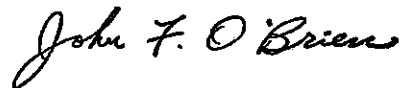
Eric J. Gouvin  
Western New England University School of Law



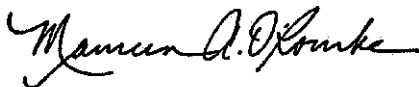
John Manning  
Harvard Law School



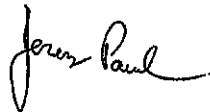
Erik Mitnick  
UMass Law



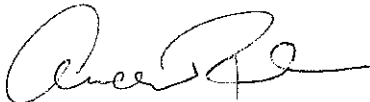
John F. O'Brien  
New England Law | Boston



Maureen A. O'Rourke  
Boston University School of Law



Jeremy R. Paul  
Northeastern University School of Law



Andrew M. Perlman  
Suffolk University Law School



Vincent D. Rougeau  
Boston College Law School

cc: Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito  
Kristen Lepore, Chief of Staff  
Lon Povich, Chief Legal Counsel  
The Honorable Ralph D. Gants  
Secretary Michael J. Heffernan  
Robert Ross, General Counsel of A&F

Secretary Marylou Sudders  
Secretary Jim Peyser  
Secretary Jay Ash  
Elizabeth Mahoney, Policy Director  
Kaitlyn Sprague, Legislative Affairs Director