

# MLAC requests \$5 million increase for civil legal aid in FY19

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.

FY19 Request: \$23 million | FY18 Appropriation: \$18 million

FY19 Recommendations: Governor - \$18.18 million

## Providing stability and safety in times of crisis

- Without civil legal aid, low-income individuals and families with serious civil legal problems related to housing, health care, immigration, domestic violence, disability benefits, and other issues must navigate the court system alone.
- Changes in federal policy and cuts to anti-poverty programs have greatly increased the civil legal needs of low-income people and the elderly, making civil legal aid more important than ever for our state's most vulnerable residents.
- Ensuring access to legal assistance for all people, not just those who can afford it, is a pillar of our state's long-standing dedication to equality and justice.

## One client's story

Paula was brought to the US by her parents as a baby. After her mother died and her father abandoned her, Paula was cared for by her grandparents. She didn't learn she was undocumented until she was 16. After years in an abusive marriage, Paula found MetroWest Legal Services, where she received help filing a petition for permanent residency and securing a divorce. She now has a work permit and a full-time job, and plans to go to college and study accounting. Said Paula, **"There was no way I would have gotten through this process without the help of my legal aid attorney."**



**Due to lack of funding, legal aid programs in Massachusetts are forced to turn away 65 percent of eligible residents – nearly 45,000 people each year – who seek help.**



## Responding to emerging needs

The impact of civil legal aid extends far beyond providing assistance in individual cases, with civil legal aid programs engaging in systemic advocacy and responding to large-scale, emerging needs such as the opioid crisis, resettlement of people affected by Hurricane Maria, and changes in federal immigration policies that threaten employment and family stability.

MLAC-funded programs closed 22,950 cases in FY17, benefiting over 83,000 individuals and family members in Massachusetts.



## Bringing economic benefits to the state

In FY16, the work of the 14 civil legal aid programs funded by MLAC provided an economic benefit of \$49.2 million to the Commonwealth's economy. This included federal benefits and other financial support for low-income residents, as well as shelter and health care cost savings for the state.

Eligibility for civil legal aid is income at or below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$31,375 a year for a family of four), making 880,949 people in Massachusetts eligible for services.

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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