

MBA PRESIDENT CHRISTOPHER P. SULLIVAN REMARKS

Thank you to the EJC's Louis Tompros, Chief Justice Ralph Gants, BBA President Mark Smith, and all of you here today —I am Chris Sullivan, president of the Massachusetts Bar Association. On behalf of the MBA, I am honored to stand with you here in this great hall as we renew our call for greater funding for legal aid in our commonwealth.

This is our 19th year at Walk to the Hill ... but sadly, the need for legal aid is not only still there, it's increasing. Increased funding for legal aid programs in Massachusetts is needed each year, because each year the need grows greater and greater.

I am incredibly proud of our profession as I look at the crowd gathered here and see all of the law firms that have teams of attorneys participating today and have taken part in the "I Walk for Justice" social media campaign. The outpouring of support by lawyers for legal aid is incredible, but not surprising.

As lawyers we not only seek justice for our clients; it's part of our DNA as sworn officers of the court to ensure that "justice for all" is more than a slogan. I also believe so many of us take part in this annual lobbying day for legal aid funding because we know firsthand about the unmet need for civil legal aid.

MBA members see it with their own eyes at courthouses around the commonwealth each day. We see the confusion and the fear in the eyes of the Boston tenant who shows up to court without representation as she faces eviction. We see it in the elderly Springfield consumer who was taken advantage of by an unscrupulous contactor. We see it in the veteran in New Bedford who needs assistance accessing his benefits.

There are literally thousands of these stories affecting low-income families around Massachusetts — stories that would have a greater chance of a positive outcome if only the people involved had access to a lawyer.

Much has been said already about this critical issue and the barriers to justice many people still face without access to legal assistance. We at the MBA agree

that this is a system in crisis, and we remain committed to advocating for increased legal aid.

The MBA is proud of our advocacy on behalf of civil legal aid, particularly the work we've done in partnership with MLAC and the Equal Justice Coalition. As the preeminent voice of the legal profession, we also believe we must be the voice of our most vulnerable citizens, as well.

Our voice becomes stronger the more people who speak up with us. That is why today — and even beyond today — I urge you to speak to your elected officials. Educate them on the importance of a fully functioning justice system. Remind them that justice is not a legal issue; it is a public issue ... one that impacts all of their constituents.

Visit their offices. Speak with their staff members. Talk to them in the towns and cities where they live. Tell them what you see in court and how this affects you and your community.

In the coming months, we will continue to meet with legislative leaders to advocate for a \$5 million increase in funding for MLAC, the largest funder of civil legal aid in Massachusetts, in the Fiscal Year '19 state budget, for a total appropriation of \$23 million.

As the statewide bar, we're also making an extra push this year to bring together attorneys in Western Mass. and their elected representatives for discussions about the fantastic work our legal aid programs are doing and the incredible unmet need that still remains.

You can also count on the MBA to do our part providing legal assistance around the state through efforts like our many Dial-A-Lawyer programs. MBA members are some of the most dedicated people in our legal community, and we have no shortage of volunteers willing to assist the people of Massachusetts that have fallen through the cracks.

Of course, we know we're not alone in our work. We are very appreciative of the many bar organizations that have worked with us to support legal aid for the

poor. Together, we make a strong team that continues to grow stronger and stronger each year.

Thank you for walking with us today. By doing so, you're making a loud statement that, in the greatest a state in the country, it is totally unacceptable when far too many Massachusetts residents go unrepresented in court because they simply cannot afford a lawyer.

More funding for legal aid is the answer, and the Massachusetts Bar Association urges our elected officials to increase funding for legal aid to ensure equal justice for all in the Commonwealth. And we encourage you to urge your legislators as well.

Thank you.