

December 20, 2018

His Excellency Charlie Baker
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 280
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Re: Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC, line item 0321-1600)
FY20 Request: \$26 million

Dear Governor Baker,

We, the general counsel of many of the Commonwealth's leading institutions and companies, thank you for approving \$21.04 million in appropriations for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) in FY19. Your support ensures that the most vulnerable residents in our state, low-income families, survivors of domestic violence, children, older adults, low-wage workers, and others, can access the justice they deserve. We urge you to continue to support equal access to justice in the Commonwealth by including \$26 million for MLAC through line item 0321-1600 in your FY20 budget recommendations.

The demand for civil legal aid often far exceeds the resources available, particularly in light of changing federal policies and recent disasters such as Hurricane Maria and the Merrimack Valley gas explosions. Lack of funding for legal aid organizations means that only a fraction of Massachusetts residents eligible for civil legal aid—those with annual incomes at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level (\$31,375 annually for a family of four)—are able to receive services. Last year, legal aid programs were forced to turn away over 45,000 eligible residents who sought assistance.

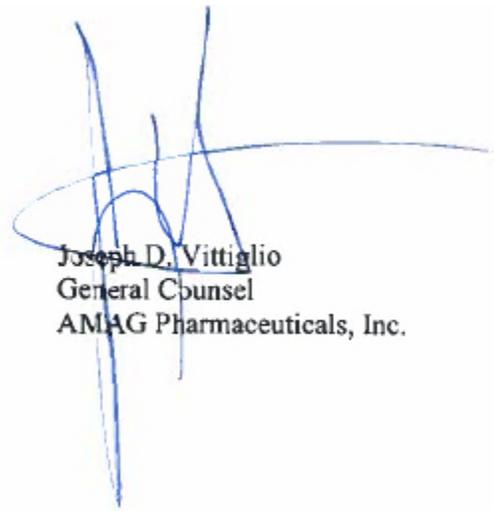
When low-income residents are able to access representation through civil legal aid, the entire Commonwealth benefits. For example, legal aid helps the justice system operate more efficiently by reducing administrative and process delays that can occur when unrepresented litigants are forced to navigate the courts on their own. Additionally, according to MLAC's FY17 economic benefits report civil legal aid provides an estimated \$59.2 million in economic benefits to the Commonwealth and its residents. These benefits include \$17.2 million saved on emergency expenditures such as health care and shelter costs for people facing homelessness, as well as \$17.6 million in new federal benefits entering the state. The work of civil legal aid also helps support local businesses. For example, civil legal aid can help low-income families access the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), enabling them to shop at local grocery stores and neighborhood farmer's markets that might otherwise be inaccessible.

In addition to bringing economic benefits and supporting the more efficient administration of justice, civil legal aid provides important social benefits that improve the lives of legal aid clients and the communities where they live and work. Funding programs that provide free, high-quality legal services helps reduce the instability caused by civil legal issues like eviction and

foreclosure, wage theft, and inability to access health care coverage, among others. Civil legal aid helps resolve cases faster than low-income individuals would be able to achieve on their own, allowing them to focus on their everyday lives at work, raising their families, and supporting their communities. This ensures that the Commonwealth has a stable workforce, healthy families, and strong communities.

Thank you for supporting civil legal aid. Once again, we urge you to increase funding for civil legal aid through the MLAC line item to \$26 million in FY20. As always, thank you for your leadership and dedication to improving the lives of all of the Commonwealth's residents.

Sincerely,



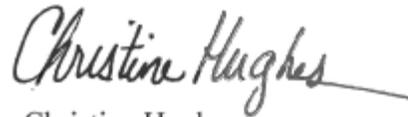
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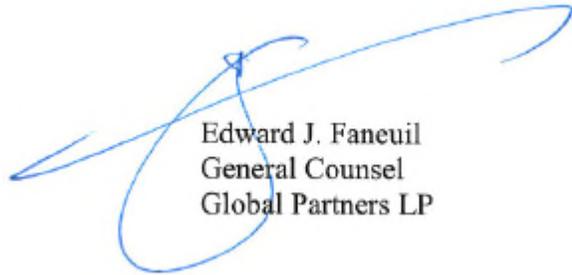
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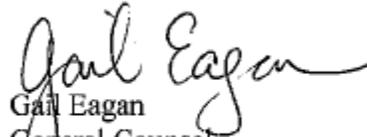
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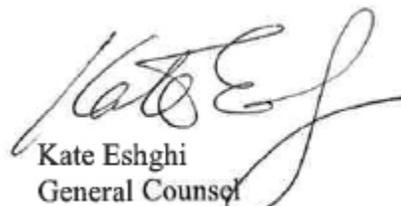
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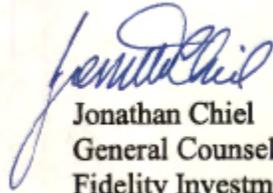
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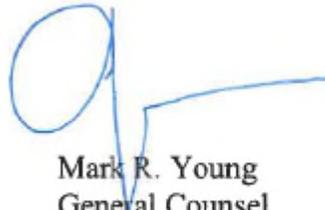
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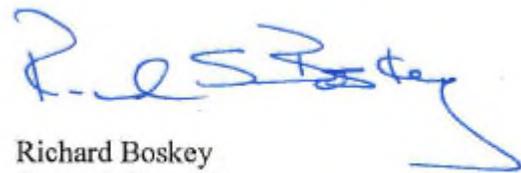
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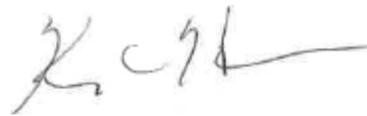
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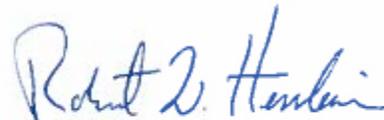
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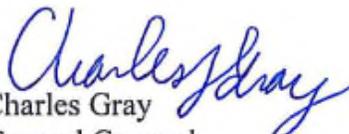
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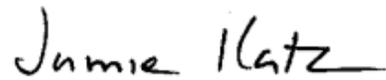
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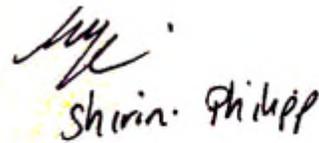
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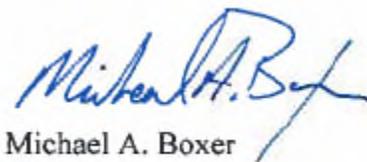

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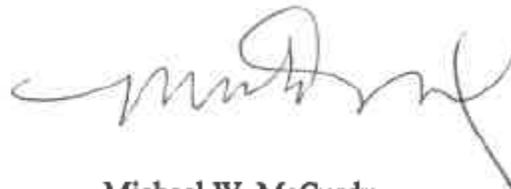
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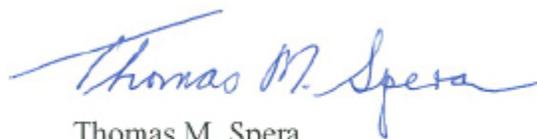
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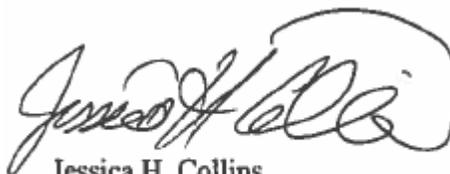
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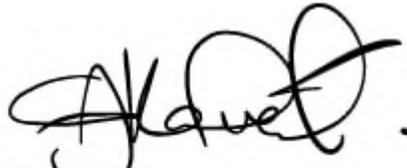
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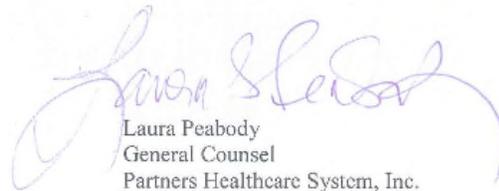
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