

December 20, 2018

His Excellency Charles D. Baker
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts State House, Room 280
24 Beacon Street
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.

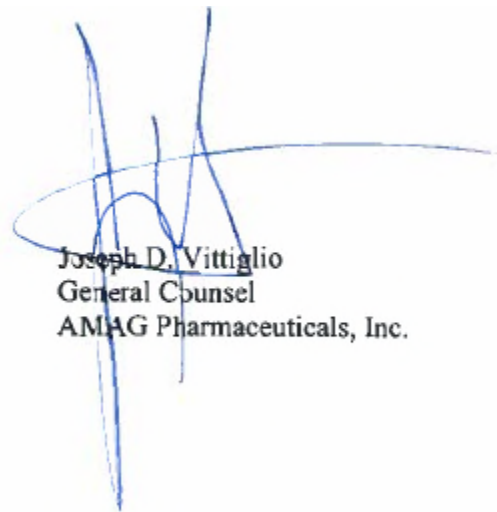
When low-income residents are able to access representation through civil legal aid, the entire Commonwealth benefits. For example, legal aid helps the justice system operate more efficiently by reducing administrative and process delays that can occur when unrepresented litigants are forced to navigate 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,



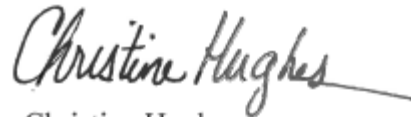
Joseph D. Vittiglio
General Counsel
AMAG Pharmaceuticals, Inc.



Deborah Marson
General Counsel
Iron Mountain Incorporated



Joann Senzel Nestor
General Counsel
Sanofi Genzyme



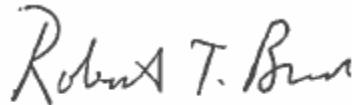
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General Counsel
Emerson College



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General Counsel
Infinity Pharmaceuticals, Inc.



Craig J. Ziady
General Counsel
Cummings Properties, LLC



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General Counsel
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General Counsel
RK Centers

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General Counsel
Global Partners LP

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Chief Legal Officer
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General Counsel
EMD Millipore Corporation




Gail Eagan
General Counsel
Arbella Insurance Group



James F. Kelleher
Chief Legal Officer
Liberty Mutual Insurance



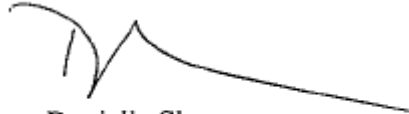
Thomas N. O'Connor
General Counsel
Baystate Financial Services, LLC



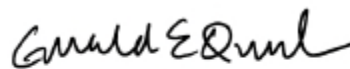
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General Counsel
Destination XL Group, Inc.



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General Counsel
Carbonite, Inc.



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General Counsel
Fenway Sports Group/Boston Red Sox



Anne Trinqué
General Counsel
Fiduciary Trust Company



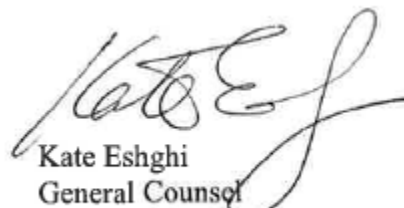
Ryan D. Darrah
Chief Legal Officer
Forrester Research, Inc.



Erika Geetter
General Counsel
Boston University



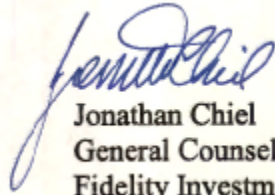
Aaron M. Grossman
General Counsel
ZOLL Medical Corporation



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General Counsel
UMass Memorial Health Care



David Beck
Chief Legal Counsel
Boston Medical Center Corporation



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Fidelity Investments



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Susan H. Alexander
Chief Legal Officer
Biogen Inc.



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General Counsel
Dassault Systemes Americas Corp.



Maria D. Buckley
General Counsel
Joslin Diabetes Center



Paul C. Nightingale
General Counsel
HP Hood LLC



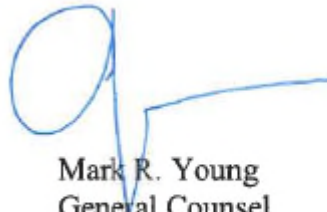
Michael MacDougall
General Counsel
EMD Serono, Inc.



Craig Barrows
General Counsel
ImmunoGen, Inc.



Richard P. Schwartz
General Counsel
National Development



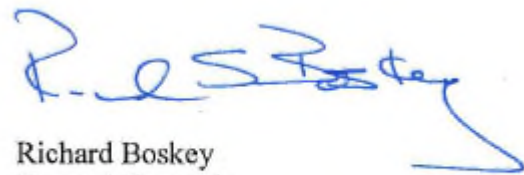
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General Counsel
TravelCenters of America LLC



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General Counsel
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Michael Lipsitz
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Santander Holdings USA, Inc.



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General Counsel
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General Counsel
Raytheon Company



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General Counsel
ABP Corporation



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Executive Vice President and General Counsel
Citrix Systems, Inc.



Heather Golding
Head of Legal & Compliance, NA
Sobi, Inc.



Tisa Hughes
Chief Legal Officer
Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, Inc.



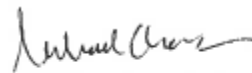
William F. Bayers
General Counsel
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt



Bill Mordan
General Counsel
Shire plc



Robert Arendell
General Counsel
Veolia North America



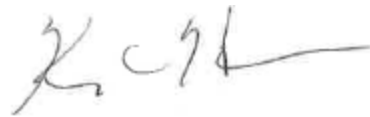
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General Counsel
Gordon Brothers Group, LLC



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General Counsel
Boston Properties, Inc.



Lynnette C. Fallon
General Counsel
Axcelis Technologies, Inc.



Kathleen Henry
General Counsel
Eastern Bank



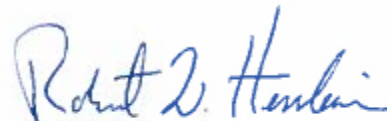
Anne Marie Cook
General Counsel
Sage Therapeutics Inc.



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General Counsel
The Bulfinch Companies, Inc.



Rodney Pratt
General Counsel
Converse



Robert W. Hesslein
General Counsel
Foundation Medicine, Inc.



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General Counsel
Cabot Corporation



David C. Phelan
General Counsel
State Street Corporation



Paul T. Dacier
General Counsel
Indigo Ag, Inc.



Beth H. Kinsley
General Counsel
Northland Investment Corporation



Christina Gonzalez
Chief Legal Officer
Staples, Inc.

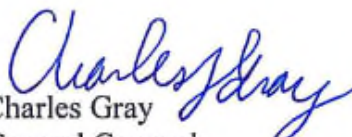
Joseph M. Herlihy
General Counsel
Boston College

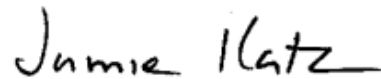
Michael O'Connor
General Counsel
MassMutual

Jennifer B. Clark
General Counsel
The RMR Group LLC

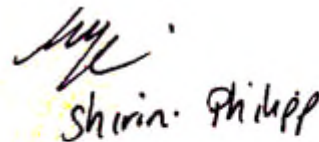
Stephanie S. Lovell
Chief Legal Officer
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts

Richard Rothberg
General Counsel
Dell Technologies

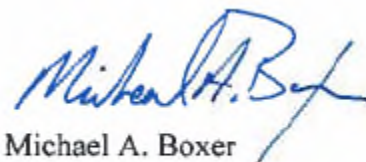

Charles Gray
General Counsel
Teradyne, Inc.



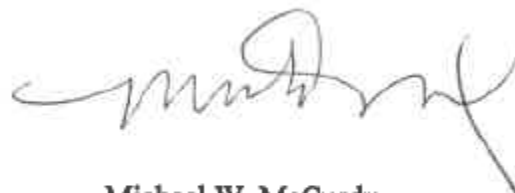
Jamie Katz
Senior Vice President and General Counsel
Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center


Shirin Phillip

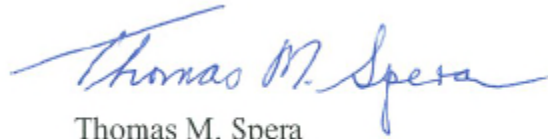
Shirin Phillip
General Counsel
Lesley University



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General Counsel
Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc.



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General Counsel
Brookline Bancorp, Inc.



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Athenahealth, Inc.



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General Electric Company



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General Counsel
Netcracker Technology



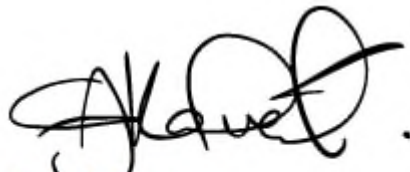
Erin Bagley
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Coverys



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Bain Capital, LLC



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Paratek Pharmaceuticals



Seth Kalvert
General Counsel
TripAdvisor Inc.

CC:

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