

Thank you, as always, to the Equal Justice Coalition for putting on this event every year and to Chris Kenney and the MBA for their partnership, and to Chief Justice Gants for his unwavering support of civil legal aid. And thank you also to everyone at MLAC for their efforts to expand civil legal services and a very warm welcome to MLAC's new Executive Director, Lynne Parker. We are incredibly fortunate to have such an extraordinary person join us to lead MLAC. Thanks also to all of you for coming here today to join in this campaign for civil legal-aid funding.

It feels presumptuous for me to speaking to you today on this subject. There are people in this room who have dedicated their professional lives to providing civil legal aid. And I know there are other people in this room in private practice who have done more year after year than I have for this cause, so let me talk to the rest of you, who may be more like me, and are susceptible to blocking out the fact that our luck can run out, and it can run out fast.

During the past year, we have seen excruciating images children being separated from their families at the border. When I first saw those images, I know that I did not immediately think about the fact that there are families being separated here in MA, whose images we don't see on TV: Sometimes that separation was as a result of immigration issues; Sometimes it was children who lost their homes, and the bedrooms they had been sleeping in, from evictions and bankruptcies; Or parents who lost child custody or child support; Or family members who needed benefits because they are sick, or elderly, or have a mental or physical disability

We may not have seen those images on our televisions, but it happened, and those are the people legal services are trying to help.

In 2014, the BBA's statewide task force to expand civil legal aid released a report that documented how great the need for civil legal services was in the Commonwealth. MBA Chris Kenney will have more on turn-away rates, but in short, it revealed that two-thirds of otherwise eligible low-income residents have to be turned away simply because legal service organizations lacked the resources.

Since the release of that report, Governor Baker and the Legislature have shown they understand the importance of civil legal aid by providing significant funding increases, including an additional \$3 million last year. We are all grateful for their leadership on this front.

But unfortunately, the need for aid has also continued to rise, and you'll hear more on this from Chris, but still roughly 45,000 eligible Massachusetts residents are turned away each year. Without legal aid, these people are forced to navigate the court system alone, with no lawyer who can say those simple but powerful words, "I can help you with that." The effect of that turn-away rate is significant. The BBA's report included a survey of judges, 60% of whom said the lack of representation negatively impacted the court's ability to ensure equal justice to unrepresented litigants.

And it affects our economy. That same BBA Report showed that for every \$1 spent on civil legal aid, the state saves between \$2 and \$5. So, we are asking you to tell your legislators you support a \$5 million increase in funding for civil legal aid

BBA President Jonathan Albano
Walk to the Hill 2019

I said at the outset that I wanted to talk to the people like me, and if you're like me, you might be tempted to say: "Yeah, I'm not going to do that part. I'm heading back to the office." Can I tell you one thing about that? The first time I met with a legislator, she told me that the best way to get a legislator to vote in favor of something was to have a constituent who cared enough to show up and say so. When you think about it, it makes sense, and I believed her.

There is a great verse from an old Leonard Cohen song, a poem really, that says

I saw a beggar leaning on his wooden crutch
He said to me, "you just can't ask for that much"
And just then a woman, leaning in her darkened door,
Cried out, "hey, why not ask more?"

Thank you for joining us today to ask for more, in support of civil legal aid, and the people who deserve access to justice.