

Lynne Parker – Walk to the Hill remarks – January 24, 2019

Good morning. Thank you to Louis Tompros for his kind introduction. Thank you to Chief Justice Gants, Chris Keeney, Jon Albano, Fred Connelly and Jacqui Bowman for speaking here today.

To those of you who, like me, are joining the Walk to the Hill for the first time – welcome! To those of you who have been coming year after year since the Walk to the Hill began 20 years ago – thank you for your longstanding commitment to supporting civil legal aid in Massachusetts!

Thank you to the many leaders at law firms across the Commonwealth for encouraging your colleagues to join you here today. Thank you to the many law students who are here with us today. And of course, thank you to the lawyers and paralegals and all the staff at civil legal aid organizations who work tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of people who are vulnerable and struggling in our state.

This is an important event, and an opportunity for us all to stand together in support of civil legal aid. Even in these uncertain times, there are areas for celebration:

- During FY18, the lives of over 95,000 clients and their families were impacted and improved through services provided by civil legal aid programs across the Commonwealth.
- And also in FY18 civil legal aid organizations provided an economic benefit of more than \$60 million dollars in revenue and cost savings to the state and to our low-income residents.

So what does this mean?

- This means that more families were able to stay in their homes, more individuals got the benefits and wages they were entitled to, more survivors of abuse got the protections they needed for themselves and their children,

and more families and individuals with mental illness or physical disabilities were able to access affordable health care to meet their needs.

With improvements to the economy, we might all assume that life has gotten easier, even for the most vulnerable among us. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. The demand for civil legal aid remains great.

Increases in housing costs often drive struggling tenants farther from their jobs. A job lay-off, a medical emergency, the denial of hard-earned benefits, or the loss of health insurance can often be catastrophic to individuals and families who are finding it difficult to make ends meet. Access to civil legal aid can really make all the difference.

I am excited to share with you today some innovative practices and partnerships that are being implemented by civil legal aid programs, and new ways and new places to make it even easier for people to get the help they need:

- Pilot programs in court help low-income debtors manage the debt they owe or to prevent a judgement against them for debt they do not owe.
- Providing tenants with help upstream, before a potential eviction gets filed in court, often helps struggling families stay in their homes.
- Lawyers imbedded in hospitals, community health centers, schools and immigration clinics, help people to get the legal information, advice, and assistance they need, when they need it, and where they need it.

At its core civil legal aid helps to assure fairness for all in the judicial system, regardless of how much money you have. We all need a strong civil legal aid system to ensure that justice for all really means justice for all. So please help us today. Talk with your legislators about the importance of civil legal aid. And ask them to support our request for \$26 million dollars this year.

Thank you.