

Civil Legal Aid for Immigrants & Refugees

Massachusetts
Legal
Assistance
Corporation

Line item 0321-1600

Civil Legal Aid plays a vital role in assisting immigrants and refugees by:

- Ensuring fair treatment and due process
- Assisting with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and TPS (Temporary Protected Status)
- Educating people on their rights and responsibilities through workshops
- Helping people secure the right to live and work in the U.S. legally
- Defending against unfair policies that target immigrants and religious minorities and divide families
- Removing barriers to education for immigrants
- Protecting access to safety net programs



An attorney with MetroWest Legal Services helped Carla and Bobby receive asylum after fleeing persecution in El Salvador.



Low-income people at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$32,188 per year for a family of four) qualify for civil legal aid.

MLAC-funded civil legal aid organizations closed

2,141

Immigration Cases in FY18

Unfortunately, lack of funding
forces Massachusetts civil legal
aid organizations to turn away:

 **80%** 

of eligible residents who seek
assistance with immigration
matters.

Legal aid produced an economic benefit of

\$60.5 million

for the Commonwealth and its
residents in FY18, including:

\$10 million

through employment authorization and other
individual rights cases on behalf of immigrants

For more information, contact:

Lynne Parker, MLAC
(617) 391-5640
lparker@mlac.org

Elaine O'Reilly, Governmental Strategies
(617) 447-5174
eoreilly@governmentalstrategies.com

Mary Ann Walsh, Governmental Strategies
(617) 447-3711
mawalsh@governmentalstrategies.com



The public charge proposal creates “a real risk that our immigrant population may begin to view all of government with distrust as a consequence of what will inevitably be received as punitive and highly discretionary eligibility determinations made under the new rule.”

- Marylou Sudders, Massachusetts Health and Human Services Secretary

What would ‘public charge’ rule changes mean?

“Public charge” is a term in immigration law to refer to a person who is likely to become dependent on the government for financial and material support.

Proposed regulations would make significant changes to the way that public charge determinations are made. They would force millions of immigrant families to make an impossible choice between meeting basic needs and keeping their families together in this country. **Civil legal aid organizations in Massachusetts are crucial to the state’s response to these policy changes** by advocating on the state and federal level, educating the public, and providing legal advice and representation for immigrant residents so that they can make the best decisions for their families.

If the government determines that someone is likely to become a public charge, that person may be denied admission to the U.S. or denied Lawful Permanent Resident status. The issue most often arises for people seeking admission through a family petition and does not include individuals applying as refugees, asylees, special immigrant juveniles, those self-petitioning through the Violence Against Women Act, and others.

In the fall of 2018, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that it would propose regulations to make significant changes to public charge rules. Those could include expanding the definition of public charge to those who receive, or are likely to receive, non-cash benefits, such as:

- Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (Food Stamps)
- Section 8 Housing Assistance
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Other federal, state, or local cash assistance programs for income maintenance

“In Massachusetts, we have worked hard to promote policies that increase economic opportunity and civic inclusion of our state’s immigrant communities.”

- Georgia Katsoulomitis, Executive Director, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute