

January 3, 2020

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

**Re: Civil Legal Aid Funding, Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation,
FY21 request for \$29M in Line item 0321- 1600**

Dear Governor Baker:

As members of the board of directors of the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), we write to thank you for your support for civil legal aid over the years. Your approval of \$24 million in funding for civil legal aid in FY20 has profoundly affected the lives of many of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents. As you prepare your budget recommendations for FY21, we urge you to keep your commitment to civil legal aid a priority by considering an appropriation of \$29 million for MLAC through line item 0321-1600.

The legal aid organizations in Massachusetts that receive MLAC funding are working tirelessly to meet growing civil legal needs of low-income residents. While we rejoice that 88,000 state residents received legal assistance this past fiscal year, around the same number of eligible clients have been turned away due to budget constraints. Increased funding for civil legal aid would help ensure that more families can stay in their homes, more parents can provide for their children, more senior citizens can receive needed benefits, and more survivors of domestic violence can receive the support and protections they need. In addition to benefiting individual clients and the communities in which they live and work, access to civil legal aid helps our justice system operate more effectively by reducing the time that court staff must spend helping unrepresented litigants, and our economy by relieving the demand on state services and helping residents access their federal benefits. In providing timely assistance to low-income clients, the legal aid community generated an economic benefit of more than \$69 million for the Commonwealth.

Civil legal aid programs work creatively and collaboratively to serve as many clients as possible but more funding is needed so that programs can recover from persistent funding shortages, work to address complex and serious emerging issues, and continue and even expand the crucial day-to-day work they have been doing in their communities for decades. Your support can ensure the continuation of this important work. Thank you for your dedication to serving the Commonwealth. This budget cycle, we hope you will pay utmost consideration to MLAC's budget appropriation request of \$29 million for civil legal aid.

Sincerely,



Marijane Benner Browne, Chair



Mala Rafik, Vice Chair



Timothy Linnehan, Treasurer



Alma Woodberry



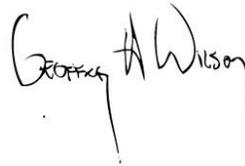
Mary Jeanne Stone



Timothy Lee



April English



Geoffrey Wilson



Richard Vitali



Edward McIntyre



Jeffrey Catalano

CC:

Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito
The Honorable Ralph D. Gants
Secretary Michael J. Heffernan
Secretary Marylou Sudders
Secretary Mike Kennealy
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Elizabeth Mahoney, Policy Director
Kaitlyn Sprague, Legislative Affairs Director
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