

January 14, 2020

His Excellency Charlie Baker  
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts State House, Room 280  
24 Beacon Street  
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 managing partners of many of the Commonwealth's prominent law firms, we extend our deepest thanks to you for your support for civil legal aid funding over the years. As you consider your budget recommendations for FY21, we are hopeful that you will continue to keep civil legal aid a priority by appropriating \$29 million for Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation through line item 0321-1600.

Your continued support for legal aid has resulted in the provision of quality assistance to eligible clients defined as those living at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$32,188 annually for a family of four—facing various civil legal issues. The impact of your support is apparent in the many legal aid success stories across the state.

For example, when Fay and John celebrated their daughter's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, they worried about her future. Their daughter was diagnosed with an intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, and depression, the effects of which made her unable to make informed decisions about her medical care and daily needs. Although she turned 18, her mental age was determined to be closer to that of an elementary school age child. Fay and John shared their concerns with their daughter's primary care provider, who referred them to MetroWest Legal Services, an MLAC-funded legal aid organization. The legal aid attorney handled all details of their guardianship petition and proceedings, and successfully helped them obtain permanent guardianship over their daughter.

It takes years of practice for law students to understand the court system, assessing legal documents and representing clients on legal matters. We can only imagine the struggles that our low-income residents go through when faced with civil legal issues where they do not have the right to a lawyer. The issues facing the most vulnerable of the Commonwealth's residents are varied and require different legal guidance and representation. In FY19, attorneys from various law firms in Massachusetts provided 73,802 hours of pro bono services, conducted under the supervision of legal aid attorneys, to clients seeking civil legal services, the monetary value of which comes to \$16,605,461. Pro bono work however, will likely never be enough to help all those in need—which is why legal aid organizations are so important. Legal aid organizations strive to achieve the Commonwealth's aspirations for equal access to justice for all, and although the path is long and arduous, their commitment has never been stronger.

As managing partners of law firms, we are acutely aware of the challenges that legal aid organizations face in hiring and retaining talented attorneys because of low pay and budget constraints. Your support for an increased appropriation will have a lasting impact on the recruitment and retention of skilled attorneys to defend the most vulnerable of our residents. In our state today, the affordable housing crisis has made it difficult for residents with housing vouchers to find homes. There has been an increase in the number and complexity of immigration cases, and an unprecedented increase in the number of older

adults living in poverty and facing many serious civil legal issues. We urge you to continue to keep your commitment to civil legal aid a priority and as you consider your FY21 budget recommendations we urge you to include \$29 million for the MA Legal Assistance Corp.

Thank you for your leadership and dedication to serving the people of Massachusetts

Sincerely,



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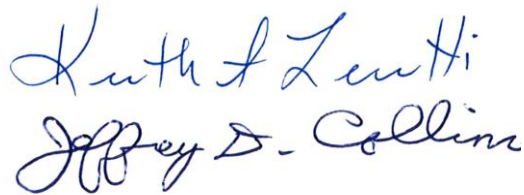


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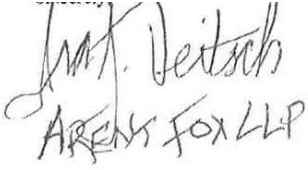
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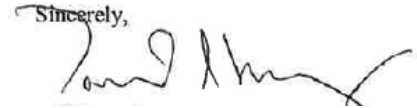


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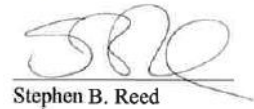
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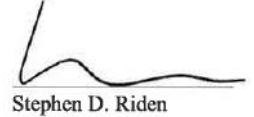
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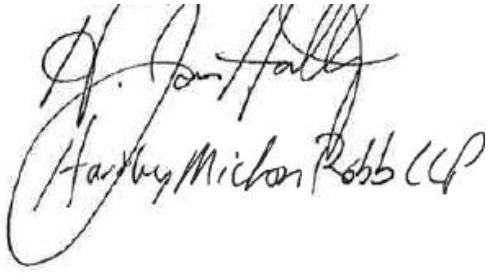
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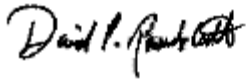
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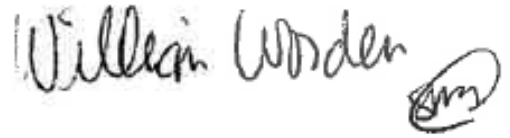
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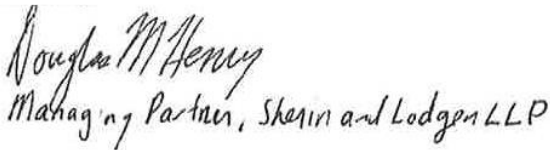
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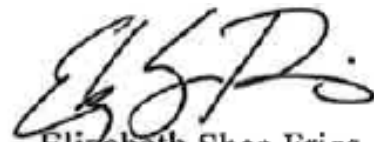
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