

# Funding Civil Legal Aid \$35 million for FY22

Line Item 0321-1600

FY21 Appropriation: \$29 million | FY22 Governor's Recommendation: \$29 million

## Civil legal aid is an essential service

Civil legal aid is a vital part of the Commonwealth's response to the **COVID crisis**, helping resolve issues related to housing, unemployment, debt, health care, domestic violence, and more.

**Low-income people are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, the faltering economy**, skyrocketing unemployment, housing insecurity, and other threats to their health, safety, and stability that often require legal assistance to resolve.

## More funding needed to address crisis

Even before the crisis, **insufficient funding** forced legal aid organizations in Massachusetts to turn away the majority of eligible people who sought help. People with an income at or below 125% of the federal poverty line - \$33,125/year for a family of four - are eligible.

Legal aid saw a surge in need in the fourth quarter of FY20 after the pandemic hit, including:

- nearly **1,800 newly unemployed workers** who need assistance securing unemployment benefits, a 290% increase over the previous fiscal year
- nearly **1,200 additional housing cases**, despite the eviction moratorium
- **400% jump in minor guardianship cases**, and a 30% increase in custody and visitation case
- **36% increase in consumer and finance cases**
- **20% spike** in immigration cases
- a desperate need for help with restraining orders and family law issues for survivors of domestic violence

## Legal aid last year:

**95,000**  
people benefitted

**\$115 million**  
in economic benefits  
to the Commonwealth  
and residents,  
including

**\$5.2 million**  
in federal benefits  
entering the  
Commonwealth

**96%**  
of Massachusetts  
towns had at least  
one resident who  
received legal aid

**“My children’s lives are completely changed because of the help we received from legal aid.”**

- Kenda, who secured stable housing and protection from an abusive spouse with help from civil legal aid

**“I want other people to be able to get the help that I did.”**

- Fred, Quincy resident who saved his home from foreclosure with help from civil legal aid

## **MLAC provides the crucial infrastructure that connects the legal aid network serving every corner of the state**

**MLAC is the largest funding source for civil legal aid in the Commonwealth.** It distributes funding to 6 regional and 10 statewide legal aid organizations across Massachusetts.

In addition to funding, MLAC provides support with information technology; data and research; hiring and recruitment; diversity, equity and inclusion; and communications. MLAC also partners with legal aid organizations, bar associations, and the Access to Justice Commission to activate a network of pro bono lawyers and publish legal self-help materials.

## **Delivering on the promise of equal justice for all**

**Civil legal aid organizations provide advice and representation at no cost to low-income people who need help** with serious legal issues. Without legal aid, residents must navigate a complex court system alone—with potentially dire consequences to their health and well-being.

Everyone deserves a fair process during civil proceedings, regardless of income. **Legal aid helps Massachusetts deliver on the promise of equal justice for all.**

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