

January 19, 2021

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

Dear Governor Baker:

Thank you for approving \$29 million for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (line item 0321-1600) in the FY21 Final Budget. As the leaders of law schools from across the Commonwealth, we are grateful for your continued support of efforts to expand access to justice in our state. Though the \$29 million provided is a great improvement, increased funding is urgently needed to help ensure that legal aid organizations can assist those most impacted by the social, economic, and health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic while remaining committed to the day-to-day work they are known for. **With this in mind, we respectfully request that you include \$35 million for the civil legal aid through the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation in your FY22 budget recommendations.**

The pandemic has touched all corners of life in Massachusetts, and the institutions we lead are no exception. Like educators across the Commonwealth and the country, we have had to grapple with how to implement remote learning while ensuring that our students receive the education they expect from us. The challenges of remote learning are even more complicated for students with developmental, emotional, and intellectual needs who require extra support from their schools and teachers. When schools began to close in mid-March, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and their families were left with little of the support they had come to rely on. Since then, legal aid organizations have worked tirelessly alongside those families to implement IEPs remotely, ensuring that students can keep up with their peers and receive the assistance they are guaranteed by law.

As both attorneys and educators, we understand the importance of access to information in empowering individuals to advocate for themselves. This value is shared by the legal aid organizations that MLAC funds, many of which have been working to develop and update self-help resources on various topics, including a catalog of [information sheets](#) specific to the impacts of COVID-19. These provide critical information to individuals seeking to understand their rights when public policy is rapidly evolving to respond to the health crisis.

Throughout the pandemic, civil legal aid has proved to be an essential service. In addition to drafting self-help materials and assisting parents with remote learning, legal aid organizations have handled a 290 percent increase in housing cases, an unprecedented surge in unemployment claims, and a 36 percent increase in consumer cases reflecting rapidly rising consumer debt. These numbers are only expected to increase as more people become eligible for legal assistance. To be eligible, potential clients must have incomes at or below the 125% of the federal poverty level—\$32,750 annually for a family of four.

As we look ahead, civil legal aid must continue to be a vital part of the Commonwealth's response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Legal assistance is an important part of our state's social safety net for our most vulnerable residents, many of whom have been made more vulnerable during the last nine months. Adequately funding legal aid will help ensure that as many people as possible receive the timely assistance they need and to ensure that our collective path forward in the weeks and months to come is equitable. For these reasons, we once again urge you to include \$35 million for civil legal aid in your upcoming budget recommendations for FY22. Thank you for your leadership and compassion during this challenging year.

Sincerely,



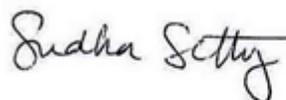
Vincent C. Rougeau  
Boston College Law School



Erik Mitnick  
UMass Law



Michael L. Coyne  
Massachusetts School of Law



Sudha N. Setty  
Western New England University School of Law



Angela Onwuachi-Willig  
Boston University School of Law



Scott P. Brown  
New England Law



Andrew M. Perlman  
Suffolk University Law School

CC:

Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito  
The Honorable Kimberly S. Budd  
Secretary Michael J. Heffernan  
Secretary Marylou Sudders  
Secretary Mike Kennealy  
Secretary Jim Peyser  
Kristen Lepore, Chief of Staff  
Robert Ross, Chief Legal Counsel  
Elizabeth Mahoney, Policy Director  
Katherine Holahan, Legislative Affairs Director  
John Stephen, General Counsel Executive Office for  
Administration and Finance