

January 13, 2021

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

**Re: FY2022 Civil Legal Aid Funding, Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation 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 strong leadership in responding to the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Massachusetts. As you consider your budget recommendations for FY22, we understand that there are many considerations to weigh, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are hopeful that you will continue to keep the essential work of civil legal aid a priority by appropriating \$35 million for Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation through line item 0321-1600.

As we grapple with the new reality during this health crisis that has had rippling socioeconomic effects, we cannot but think of how this disproportionately affects the most vulnerable of our state's residents. Like always, Massachusetts' strong network of civil legal aid organizations is hard at work providing timely responses and solutions to the civil legal needs of their growing low-income client base. Your past support for legal aid funding has built a solid foundation of support for the Commonwealth's low-income residents, who face complex legal issues requiring varied legal guidance and representation. As in the past, we stand ready to assist legal aid organizations by providing pro bono legal services to their clients, but these volunteer efforts are not enough to bridge the gap. Support for MLAC is needed now more than ever to provide for the additional resources necessary to resolve their emerging civil legal needs.

Since the start of the pandemic, these legal aid organizations have been working tirelessly to respond to pressing civil legal questions and issues. To name a few examples, they have successfully helped file an increased number of domestic violence restraining orders, aided tenants facing evictions and foreclosures, provided clarifications on paid sick leave rights under the Family and Medical Leave Act, helped parents and students with implementation of remote individual education plans, and assisted with a hugely increased number of unemployment insurance applications, bankruptcy filings, debt collection, and identity thefts. It is hard to fathom the lasting impacts of this pandemic on our community's most underserved and vulnerable populations. We need civil legal aid organizations to provide the essential services necessary to strive to achieve the Commonwealth's aspiration of equal access to justice for all, especially during this time.

We urge you to keep your commitment to civil legal aid a priority as you consider your budget recommendations for FY22 by including \$35 million in the MLAC appropriation.

Sincerely,

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CC:

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