

Funding Civil Legal Aid \$35 million for FY22

Line Item 0321-1600

FY21 Appropriation: \$29 million | FY22 Governor's Recommendation: \$29 million
FY22 House Ways & Means: \$35 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 cases
- **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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