

December 29, 2021

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,
line item 0321-1600 FY23 Budget Request: \$41 million**

Dear Governor Baker:

We, the counsel of many of the Commonwealth's leading institutions and companies, would like to thank you for approving \$35 million for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (line item 0321-1600) in the FY22 budget. This allocation demonstrates your commitment to improving access to justice in the Commonwealth. For this we are grateful. **As you look ahead to your FY23 budget recommendations, we ask that you please include \$41 million for MLAC and civil legal aid.**

Your ongoing support for legal services has helped MLAC-funded organizations across Massachusetts protect the livelihood and safety of clients like Luis.

Luis, a Navy veteran, was born in Puerto Rico. He relied on a car for work, and needed to apply for a Massachusetts driver's license. The driver's license application required a birth certificate. But in 2010, to combat extensive fraud, Puerto Rico invalidated all previously-issued birth certificates. After unsuccessfully trying to navigate the byzantine procedures for obtaining a new Puerto Rican birth certificate, Luis came to Veterans Legal Services for help. VLS was able to obtain Luis's birth certificate, allowing him to successfully apply for a driver's license and obtain gainful employment within the Commonwealth.

Despite the challenges of providing assistance throughout the changing circumstances of the pandemic, Luis is one of nearly 92,000 people who benefitted from legal aid last year. Still, the ongoing impacts of the crisis, along with the health, economic, and social disparities the pandemic has exacerbated, have strained the resources of legal aid organizations. In FY21, these challenges forced legal aid organizations to turn away 57 percent of eligible clients— defined as those who make less than 125% of the federal poverty level or \$33,125 annually for a family of four—impacting approximately 75,000 low-income people across Massachusetts.

As the year continues, legal aid organizations expect a surge across multiple case areas, including a 45 percent increase in mental health cases and a 7 percent increase in domestic abuse cases, among many others. Increased funding in FY23 will help legal aid organizations address this surge and help provide the infrastructure needed to prepare for future crises. It will allow the organizations to invest in their workforce and recruit and retain the staff needed to provide the best legal assistance possible.

In addition to being an essential part of the Commonwealth's social safety net and its emergency response to the pandemic, legal aid is a wise investment of state resources. Last year, legal aid organizations helped

save the Commonwealth over \$11 million on emergency shelter and healthcare costs. Additionally, legal aid attorneys recovered more than \$90 million in government benefits for their clients.

Adequately funding civil legal aid is critical to ensuring that our state's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is just and equitable. To this end, we ask that you include \$41 million for MLAC in your upcoming budget recommendations.

We thank you for your leadership during these trying times.

Sincerely,



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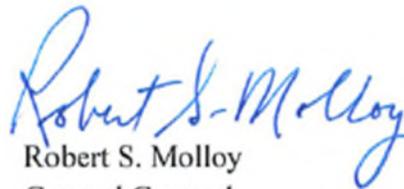
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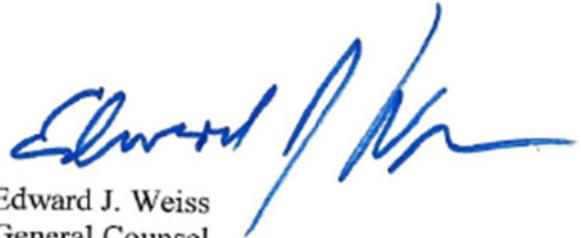
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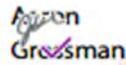
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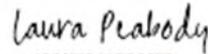


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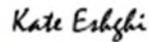
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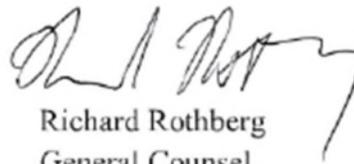
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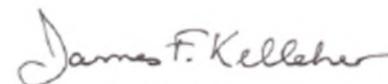
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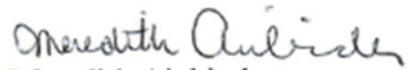
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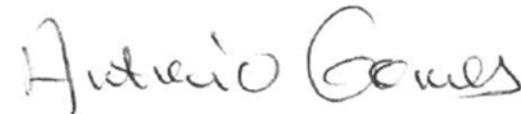


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