

December 22, 2021

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

Dear Governor Baker:

As the deans of law schools across Massachusetts, we are grateful for the \$35 million you approved for civil legal aid and the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation in the FY22 budget. However, as the New Year begins, increased funding is urgently needed to address the many long-term impacts of COVID-19 on our justice system and in our communities. **For this reason, we write to you in support of the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation's FY23 request for \$41 million (line item 0321-1600). We urge you to include this amount in your upcoming budget recommendations.**

Like many others, the institutions we lead have been upended by the pandemic, requiring creative solutions to provide our students with the education they were promised at the start of their law school careers. The same can be said for the legal aid organizations who have worked diligently since March of 2020 to ensure that their clients did not bear the burden of service interruptions. In the past year and a half legal aid organizations have been creative when faced with the unique challenges of providing legal assistance during the crisis. From developing partnerships with social service agencies and law schools like ours to creating self-help materials and safe spaces in their offices where clients can participate in remote hearings, legal aid organizations have proved to be innovative and flexible. **As a result, MLAC-funded legal aid organizations helped nearly 92,000 people last year.**

Still, the demand for legal assistance continues to outpace the resources available. In FY21, legal aid organizations were forced to turn away **57 percent of eligible clients, impacting over 74,000 low-income people facing civil legal cases in which they are not guaranteed an attorney.** Eligible clients make less than 125% of the federal poverty level or \$33,125 annually for a family of four. Additionally, the pandemic's mental health challenges, financial insecurity, and isolation have complicated many cases, further straining legal aid organizations. Increased funding in FY23 will be vital to helping legal aid organizations hire and retain the talented staff members needed to address the increasingly complicated cases facing the legal services system.

As educators ourselves, we are deeply aware of the struggles that schools across the Commonwealth face. Many districts continue to grapple with educating their students within the ever-changing circumstances of the pandemic. As teacher and staff shortages intensify and the impacts of months of remote learning are revealed, low-income students, those with disabilities, and English language learners disproportionately suffer the consequences. MLAC-funded legal aid organizations are on the front lines of responding to these disparities.

In addition to helping students gain access to the education they deserve, **legal aid organizations generated over \$102 million in economic benefits for the Commonwealth last year. This includes nearly \$91 million in benefits won for clients.** These benefits help clients gain food security, medical care, housing, and financial support for their families.

As attorneys, we understand the critical role that legal aid plays in protecting vulnerable and low-income people across Massachusetts. Increased funding for legal services will help keep more of our neighbors in their homes, protect more people from domestic violence, and help more families access the resources they need. As we rebuild the Commonwealth, adequately funding civil legal aid will help ensure that our communities are more equitable than before the pandemic began. To this end, **we respectfully request that you include \$41 million for MLAC in your FY23 budget recommendations.**

Sincerely,



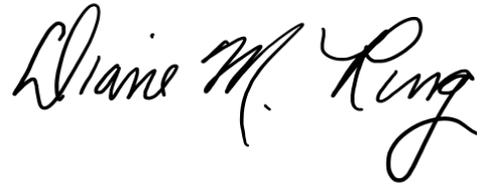
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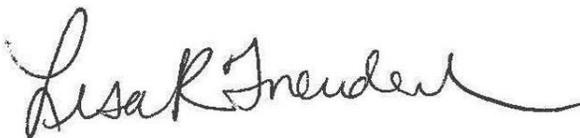
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