

December 29, 2021

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

Dear Governor Baker:

As managing partners representing prominent law firms from across Massachusetts, we want to thank you for your continued support for legal services. The \$35 million provided for civil legal aid and the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) in FY22 is a welcome investment in access to justice at a crucial time in our state's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. As you consider your budget recommendations for FY23, we hope you will continue to prioritize legal aid and include \$41 million for MLAC, line-item 0321-1600.

As attorneys, we understand how complicated the court system can be, spending years gaining the expertise needed to navigate it. We can only imagine the struggles that low-income people go through when unrepresented, especially given the impacts that COVID-19 has had on the courts. For eligible clients—those who make less than 125% of the federal poverty level or \$33,125 annually for a family of four—civil legal aid can make all the difference when facing eviction, loss of benefits, domestic violence, and other serious civil legal issues. Fortunately, in FY21 legal aid organizations were able to help nearly 92,000 people.

In addition to providing direct representation, legal aid organizations responded to the unique challenges of the pandemic by providing access to valuable resources that further level the playing field. These resources include translators, pre-paid cell phones, self-help materials, and new office spaces where clients can safely participate in remote hearings. Increased funding in FY23 would allow legal aid organizations to continue to respond to the changing circumstances of the pandemic with flexibility and creativity. The proposed \$6 million increase will also be vital to helping legal aid organizations address an anticipated surge in need across multiple areas, including a 37 percent increase in unemployment compensation cases, a 42 percent increase in housing discrimination cases, and a 58 percent increase in disability rights cases, among many others.

As the need for assistance continues to grow, legal aid organizations must ensure that their staffs are dedicated and well-trained. Unfortunately, like other industries across Massachusetts, legal aid organizations have struggled to hire and retain staff members—an issue that has been exacerbated since the onset of the pandemic. Your support for an increased appropriation will have a lasting impact on the recruitment and retention of skilled attorneys, paralegals, and other staff members to defend the most vulnerable of our residents. Increased funding would allow civil legal aid organizations to invest in their workforce and provide trainings and salary increases that reflect the difficulty of providing assistance during the crisis.

Since the pandemic began, civil legal aid has been an essential part of the Commonwealth's emergency response. As we move forward, it must also be an essential part of the recovery process. By increasing funding for legal services, your administration will be helping to ensure that those who have been hit hardest by the crisis will have access to justice when they need it most.

With this in mind, we once again ask that you please include \$41 million for civil legal aid and the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation in your FY23 budget recommendations.

Thank you for your leadership and all that you do for the Commonwealth.

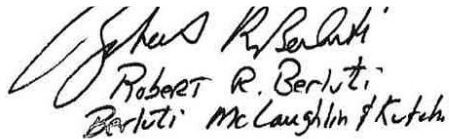
Sincerely,



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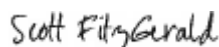
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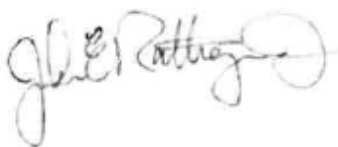
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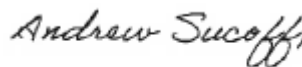


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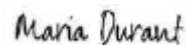
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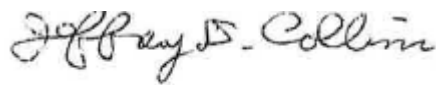
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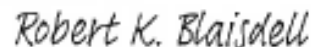
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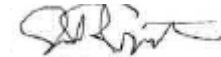
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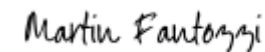
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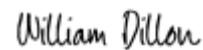
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