

Funding Civil Legal Aid \$41 million for FY23



Line Item 0321-1600 | FY22 Appropriation: \$35 million | FY23 Governor's Recommendation: \$35 million
FY23 House Budget: \$41 million | FY23 Senate Budget: \$41 million

The need for civil legal aid intensified during the pandemic

Legal aid cases increased significantly during the pandemic in several areas. In each year of COVID-19, legal aid organizations have seen on average:

- **4,643** income maintenance cases, a **73% total jump**
- **2,788** unemployment insurance compensation cases, a **353% total spike**
- **3,039** family law cases, a **24% total increase**
- **7,778** housing cases, an **8% total increase**
- **2,504** immigration representation cases, a **15% total increase**
- **323** bankruptcy cases, an **11% total rise**

Even before the crisis, **insufficient funding** forced legal aid organizations to turn away the majority of eligible people who sought help. Recent funding increases have enabled civil legal aid organizations to **reduce the percent of eligible people turned away to 57%**, down from 64% five years ago.

Civil legal aid is an essential service

Civil legal aid is a vital part of the Commonwealth's response to the COVID-19 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, unemployment, housing insecurity, and other threats to their health, safety, and stability that often require legal assistance to resolve.

Legal aid last year:

92,000
people benefited

\$103
million

in economic benefits to
the Commonwealth and
residents

330
cities and towns in
Massachusetts reached
by legal aid

People with an income
at or below **125%** of
the federal poverty line
—\$34,688/year for a
family of four—are
eligible for civil legal aid.

“I do believe that if I didn’t [have legal aid] to help with the appeal... I would not have been able to get my family out of that financial burden.”

Malensky, who got her job back after being wrongfully fired after using FMLA to care for her daughter when the pandemic forced schools to close

“Not only were we able to keep our home and keep from being thrown out on the streets, but now we have the opportunity to purchase the home.”

Raymond, a U.S. Army veteran who received civil legal aid when his landlord sought to evict him and his family after he complained about hazardous conditions in his home

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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