

Civil Legal Aid in Employment



Line Item 0321-1600

Civil legal aid is a lifeline that helps Massachusetts residents retain or access critical unemployment benefits that allow them to stabilize their housing, access health care, and avoid financial crises. Legal aid organizations have seen unemployment compensation cases increase by 320% since the COVID-19 pandemic began. In response, legal aid advocates adopted new and innovative ways to help people file online unemployment applications and appeal wrongful denials. Programs have devoted extra attention to assisting those with limited computer access and/or limited English proficiency.

Legal aid helps people with low incomes facing:

- Improper denial of unemployment compensation
- Wage theft
- Employment discrimination
- Unsafe working conditions or unfair labor practices

2,884

employment cases were closed in FY22, including cases involving:

2,119 Unemployment Insurance

493 Taxes

97 Wage Claims and Fair Labor Standards Act Issues

64 Employee Rights

60 Employment Discrimination

51 Earned Income Tax Credit, Agricultural Worker Issues, and Other Employment

\$126 million

estimated economic benefits civil legal aid delivered to the Commonwealth and its residents, including:

\$105,259,736

in estimated benefits won for clients

\$21,647,960

in reimbursements and savings obtained for the Commonwealth

People and families with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$37,500 per year for a family of four; \$18,225 for an individual) qualify for civil legal aid.



Martin* was a self-employed newspaper delivery person. When COVID-19 hit, business slowed to a crawl. Martin fell behind on rent and lost critical access to the car he had been borrowing for his job because the car's owner could no longer afford the monthly car payments. Martin applied for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and was deemed ineligible due to the Department of Unemployment Assistance's mistaken belief that he had not been impacted by COVID-19. A **Community Legal Aid** attorney helped Martin demonstrate the direct financial impact the pandemic had on his work. As a result, he was approved for nearly a year and a half's worth of retroactive benefits.

*Name changed for privacy