

December 12, 2023

The Honorable Maura Healey
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 280
24 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

RE: Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), Line Item 0321-1600

Dear Governor Healey:

As deans of law schools from across the Commonwealth, we thank you for supporting \$49 million for civil legal aid in the FY24 budget through the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) line item, 0321-1600. In our lecture halls and classrooms, we teach students that litigants do not have a right to an attorney in most civil cases and that when people can't afford to hire legal representation, they are frequently denied the justice they deserve. We also teach them about legal aid and how it's vital for keeping Massachusetts residents healthy, safe, and stable. **For this reason, we support MLAC's request for \$55 million in FY25. We urge you to include this full amount in your upcoming budget recommendations.**

Our students, committed to equality before the law, do their part to address the "justice gap" in the civil legal system. Under the supervision of school faculty and legal aid attorneys, they regularly support and offer advice to community members with low incomes who need help with housing, unemployment compensation, Social Security appeals, health care access, consumer debt issues, restraining orders, and more. We are immensely proud of their talent, passion, and vision—and we want them to have the resources to continue this important social justice work after graduation.

Far too often, new attorneys – managing student loan debt – must choose between serving their communities and meeting their financial obligations. People interested in legal aid careers are deterred by legal aid salaries and opt for higher-paying positions within private law firms or positions in areas with lower costs of living. As educators tasked with training the next generation of lawyers, we are concerned about the future of the legal aid workforce in Massachusetts, and the effects of an attorney shortage on prospective legal aid clients.

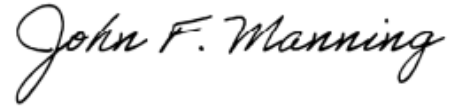
In light of this, we urge you to include MLAC's \$55 million request in your FY25 budget recommendations. With additional state funding, legal aid offices could raise staff salaries, strengthen loan forgiveness programs, provide relocation bonuses, expand their administrative and support staff, and hire up-and-coming lawyers like our graduates—building a robust workforce to support residents everywhere in Massachusetts for years to come. Additional funding would also send an important message to our students and alumni considering public interest careers, and to people considering a legal education: the Commonwealth needs, values, and routinely invests in legal aid attorneys.

Thank you for your investment in legal aid thus far. We look forward to your recommendations for FY25.

Sincerely,



Michael Coyne
Massachusetts School of Law



John Manning
Harvard Law School



Allison M. Dussias
Acting Dean and Professor of Law
New England Law



Angela Onwuachi-Willig
Boston University School of Law



James Hackney
Northeastern University School of Law



Sam Panarella
UMass Law



Zelda B. Harris
Dean and Professor of Law
Western New England University School of Law



Andrew Perlman
Suffolk University School of Law



Odette Lienau
Marianne D. Short, Esq., Dean, Boston College Law School

CC:

Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll

Chief Justice Kimberly S. Budd, Supreme Judicial Court

Secretary Matthew Gorzkowicz, Administration and Finance

Secretary Kate Walsh, Health and Human Services

Secretary Edward Augustus, Housing and Livable Communities

Kate Cook, Chief of Staff

Paige Scott Reed, Chief Legal Counsel

Gabrielle Viator, Senior Advisor

Alicia Rebello-Pradas, Deputy Chief of Staff for Legislative Affairs

Cecilia Ugarte Baldwin, Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Cabinet Affairs