

January 17, 2024

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

Governor Healey:

Thank you for your support of our state's network of civil legal aid organizations. As law firm managing partners, we are well aware of how complicated the legal system can be. The \$49 million you and the legislature provided for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) in the FY24 budget is a critical investment that is helping to secure basic needs – including shelter, safety, and financial stability – for our most vulnerable neighbors.

With increasingly high demand for legal aid across the Commonwealth, more funding is still needed to help as many people as possible. We therefore kindly ask that you allocate \$55 million for MLAC (line item 0321-1600) in your upcoming FY25 budget recommendations.

As you know well, it takes years of practice to understand our court system. People who cannot afford an attorney must deal with civil legal issues on their own, and the stakes in these cases can be extremely high. Common issues involve preservation of tenancies, health care access, family stability, housing conditions, employment discrimination, domestic violence, consumer issues, and immigration status. When Massachusetts residents are forced to navigate the legal system alone, they are at a significant disadvantage and at risk of serious harm.

Fortunately, our colleagues in legal aid organizations provide legal representation and information to our neighbors with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$37,500 per year for a family of four and \$18,225 for an individual) at no cost. In FY23, legal aid organizations helped approximately 95,600 people, in 95% of Massachusetts cities and towns. MLAC grantees reported total economic benefits to the Commonwealth of nearly \$100 million, consisting of awards won for clients, reimbursements paid to the Commonwealth, and cost savings to the Commonwealth in the form of shelter and health care costs saved.

We celebrate these important achievements and the state investments that have made them possible, while acknowledging that there is much work still to be done. Despite significant improvements in recent years, legal aid organizations cannot afford to help everyone, and the cases being brought to their offices are only getting more complex and costly. Demand for services remains greater than what legal aid organizations can currently provide.

Attorneys in Massachusetts are doing their part to increase access to legal services. In FY23, they collectively donated 40,547 *pro bono* hours (valued at \$8,391,785) through MLAC-funded programs. However, while the bar's *pro bono* initiatives help bolster the capacity of the state's legal aid network, they are nowhere near enough to support everyone in need in the

Commonwealth. Additional state funding for legal aid organizations, through the MLAC line item (0321-1600), is the best way to continue to narrow this “justice gap” in our courts.

We urge you to keep civil legal aid a priority and include \$55 million for MLAC in your FY25 budget recommendations.

Sincerely,

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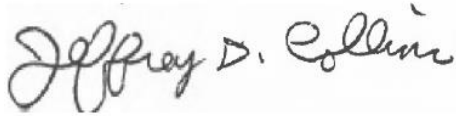
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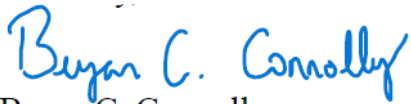


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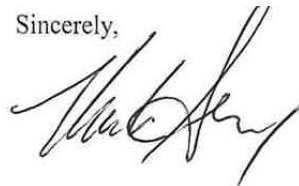


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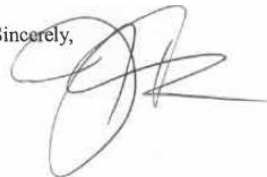
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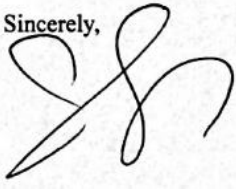
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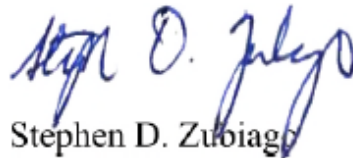
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