

# Civil Legal Aid for Children



Line Item 0321-1600

Civil legal aid changes lives for children and their families who need help with a wide range of serious issues, including protecting a student's rights at school. Learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic is still affecting children in elementary, middle, and high schools across Massachusetts. The impact is particularly detrimental to students who need special education, remedial programs, behavioral interventions, and other supportive services.

## Civil legal aid attorneys help children and families address:

- Access to equal education and opportunities regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, language, or disability
- Trauma that affects a child's ability to succeed in school
- Guardianship, custody, domestic violence, and other family law issues
- Public benefits for families, including SNAP, disability benefits, emergency assistance, and access to health care
- Immigration, asylum, and family separation

People and families with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$39,000 per year for a family of four; \$18,825 for an individual) qualify for civil legal aid.

## Legal Aid in FY23:

**2,695** children benefitted from the direct representation of legal aid lawyers. *Thousands more benefitted from services provided to family members.*

**11%** of legal aid clients were under 18 years old.



**Pablo** (name changed for privacy) is a seventh grader who has autism, an intellectual disability, and dyslexia. After receiving an independent assistive technology evaluation, Pablo's parents reached out to a civil legal aid organization for help ensuring his school implemented the evaluator recommendations, which were not on his current Individual Education Plan (IEP). The new recommendations included providing headphones, text-to-speech software, and training to support Pablo's use of his new technology.

Legal aid staff drafted a revision of Pablo's IEP and advocated for his parents' concerns during IEP meetings. As a result, the IEP team agreed to include all the new recommendations in Pablo's IEP. With these supports in place, Pablo achieved his annual goals for both reading and writing.

## HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

In FY22, MLAC received special one-time funding from the state legislature for the “High Quality Education for All” (HQEA) initiative.

Eight legal aid organizations received grants to address systemic challenges faced by children from families with low incomes, with a special focus on those for whom the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be particularly disruptive and traumatic. The project targets policies and practices that have a disparate, adverse impact on protected groups of students and impede their opportunities to learn.

In FY23, HQEA grantees resolved a total of 155 education cases for clients and their families. They also held 22 informational sessions/ trainings for community members and social service workers.



# 11.5%

of Massachusetts children live below the poverty threshold.

## Legal Aid: A Sound Investment

Nearly **\$100 million** in economic benefits were provided by legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including more than **\$3.7 million** in total lifetime child support secured through legal advocacy.

### Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

18 Tremont St., Suite 1010  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108  
617-367-8544

### Lynne Parker Executive Director, MLAC

lparker@mlac.org  
617-391-5640

### Mary Ann Walsh | Mary Ann Mulligan Governmental Strategies

mawalsh@governmentalstrategies.com  
617-447-3711  
mamulligan@governmentalstrategies.com  
617-447-5043