

Civil Legal Aid in Health Care



Line Item 0321-1600

Civil legal aid organizations ensure people with low incomes have access to essential health care services. They also help people solve problems that impact their overall health and well-being.

Civil legal aid attorneys:

- Identify and correct administrative errors and issues that jeopardize access to treatment
- Address the improper denial, termination, or reduction of public health benefits
- Appeal denial of coverage for life-sustaining medications or procedures
- Advocate for the rights of children, families, older adults, veterans, people with behavioral health needs, immigrants, and asylum seekers so they can access essential health care and make the best medical decisions for themselves and their families
- Partner with health care providers in medical-legal partnerships that help address the social determinants of health (see page 2)

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.



96-year-old **Ellen** (name changed for privacy) was brought to the emergency room when her son, who was her primary caregiver, beat her, causing significant injury. Ellen wanted to be safe, and hospital staff were concerned about sending her home. The police and a local domestic violence agency had helped Ellen obtain an emergency restraining order against her son.

An attorney from the hospital's medical-legal partnership (MLP) represented Ellen at her hearing, which was held virtually as Ellen was still admitted. Thanks to the MLP and her attorney's assistance, the protection order was extended for one year, and Ellen's granddaughter was identified as a caring family member who could assist her at home.

407

health cases were closed in FY23, including cases involving:

184 Medicaid

113 Medicare

23 Long-term Health Care Facilities

22 State and Local Health

65 Other (including Private Health Insurance)

MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS

Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLPs) bring civil legal aid and health care together in an integrated, collaborative model. MLP attorneys provide legal needs trainings for health care staff to help them identify when a legal aid referral is necessary. Doctors, nurses, social workers, and other health care providers can then work directly with a legal aid attorney (who is often on-site at the hospital or clinic) to solve problems that impact patient health and have a legal solution. For example, a doctor may discover that early cognitive delays in a child are related to unsafe levels of lead in that family's rental home. Through a quick on-site referral to legal aid, that family can get an attorney for no cost who can bring a case to compel the landlord to remove the lead, as required by law.

MLPs are a proven and effective way to bring much-needed civil legal aid to more people when and where they are in crisis.

In FY22, MLAC received special funding from the legislature to support a statewide Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLP) Project. Seven legal aid organizations received an additional infusion of resources for their MLP programs, which helped them grow existing partnerships, launch new partnerships, and help more patients.



Poverty is correlated with increased barriers to health and health care access, including mental health treatment and lifesaving medications.

Legal Aid: A Sound Investment

Nearly **\$100 million** in estimated benefits were provided by legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including over **\$2 million** in health benefits and savings.

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