

Civil Legal Aid in Income Maintenance



Line Item 0321-1600

Civil legal aid helps people with low incomes stabilize their household incomes so they can afford basic needs and care for themselves and their families. Inflation, stagnant wages, and systemic inequality have made it especially hard for families with limited finances to afford the everyday costs of living in our state.

Legal aid helps Massachusetts residents access basic necessities by:

- Helping people gain access to necessary income supports (including social security, SNAP/food stamps, temporary cash assistance, and veterans benefits)
- Addressing the improper denial, termination, or reduction of public health benefits

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.



Often, clients come to legal aid with not just one but a set of complex and interconnected issues that they need resolved in order to truly gain stability and overcome barriers to opportunity. One such client was **Jen** (name changed for privacy), a woman who needed help setting safe boundaries for herself during negotiations about her ex-husband's custody and visitation rights (the couple shared three children). Jen's ex had been violent towards her, and a legal aid family law attorney helped her through her divorce proceedings to protect herself and her children. But Jen still faced the problem of supporting her kids on her own. She had a good union job, but her wages were not enough to cover the cost of childcare.

Another attorney at Jen's local legal aid worked with both the Department of Transitional Assistance and the Department of Early Education and Care to secure a childcare stipend for Jen. The stipend allows Jen to work at her union job while her son attends preschool, and it also provides for Jen's daughter to have after-school care.

Legal Aid: A Sound Investment

Nearly **\$100 million** in estimated benefits were provided by legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year.

1,517 income maintenance cases closed in FY23, including cases involving:

382 SSI (Supplemental Security Income)

280 SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance)

305 SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program)

235 Other Income Maintenance

166 TAFDC (Temporary Assistance for Families with Dependent Children)

59 Social Security

45 State and Municipality Operated Income Maintenance Program

45 Veterans Benefits