

Civil Legal Aid for Older Adults



Line Item 0321-1600

Civil legal aid helps older adults protect their financial stability, health, safety, and shelter. The Massachusetts population is aging, and the share of older adults living in poverty is increasing. According to U.S. Census data, 18% of Massachusetts residents — nearly one in five people — were over age 65 in 2023. In FY23, 23% of cases closed by Massachusetts civil legal aid organizations were for clients age 60 or older (a total of 5,448 cases).

Access to civil legal aid in times of crisis can be a lifeline for older adults facing challenges that impact their most essential needs, including:

- Housing
- Physical safety and protections for survivors of domestic violence
- Access to health care, disability benefits, Medicare, Social Security, veterans benefits, and other public benefits
- Bankruptcy, financial abuse, and other consumer law challenges
- Guardianship, care of children and grandchildren, and other family law issues
- Durable powers of attorney and health care proxies
- Nursing home issues, including conditions, transfer, and discharge

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. Older adults may qualify for assistance at certain organizations regardless of their income.

Legal Aid: A Sound Investment

Nearly **\$100 million** in estimated economic benefits were provided by legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including more than **\$2 million** in health benefits and savings and more than **\$14.7 million** in avoided emergency shelter costs.



Rosa (name changed for privacy) lost her eviction case because she was having difficulty logging into the Zoom platform to attend a court proceeding. Rosa is elderly and not accustomed to using computer technology, and she was very anxious about the prospect of losing her housing. A civil legal aid attorney was contacted and informed of the 48-hour eviction notice Rosa received. She took legal action to prevent the eviction from moving forward, which involved negotiations with Rosa's landlord and his attorney.

A civil legal aid paralegal also assisted Rosa with an application for rental assistance, which she received and used to pay back the rent she owed. Together, the parties agreed that the eviction proceeding would be canceled, and Rosa would proactively look for alternative housing. She is now at the top of the priority list for subsidized housing and expects to move somewhere sustainable in the near future. Thanks to civil legal aid, Rosa avoided losing her housing and has no eviction on her record.