
Report to the Governor and General Court FY24

Introduction

In FY24, Massachusetts legal aid organizations proved once again that they transform lives and communities every day with their work expanding access to justice. MLAC is proud to fund 16 of our state's exemplary legal services providers, and we are grateful for the opportunity to provide an update on their progress with this report.

More than 80,000 people benefitted from legal aid in FY24, hailing from cities and towns all across the Commonwealth. Legal aid organizations not only removed barriers to basic needs through the justice system, but they helped people and families empower themselves with knowledge, information, and resources to self-advocate and achieve long-lasting stability.

In its FY24 budget, the Massachusetts State Legislature appropriated \$49 million for civil legal aid, through MLAC's line item 0321-1600. MLAC distributed that funding to 16 statewide and regional legal aid organizations through our grant-funding process. MLAC also received money from Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) funds, as well as from government grants and private foundations. Altogether, in FY24, MLAC distributed \$70,456,031 to organizations across Massachusetts that provide civil legal aid to people with low incomes.

For the parents of a child with disabilities, legal aid secured adequate support and accommodations for their child at school; for a senior living on a fixed income, legal aid assisted in obtaining a housing voucher for an accessible unit and connecting to reliable, affordable medical care; for a working mother struggling to make ends meet, legal aid helped her to receive much-needed support from government assistance programs so she could put food on the table for her family each night.

These and many more success stories are encapsulated in the numbers presented here. The data and measures in this report illustrate the power of a strong statewide network of civil legal aid programs—and the effects of investment in civil legal aid. Thank you for supporting this important work in FY24.

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MLAC Basics and Background

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation is the largest funding source for civil legal aid in the Commonwealth. MLAC was established by the Commonwealth in 1983 to ensure that people with low incomes facing critical, non-criminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice, and representation.

MLAC's mission is to provide leadership and support to improve civil legal services to people with low incomes in Massachusetts through collaboration with the legal services community, the public, the bar, and the legislature.

MLAC receives funding from a variety of sources, primarily the state budget and Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) funds, and disburses it to qualified civil legal aid organizations across the Commonwealth.

In FY24, MLAC received revenue from several sources:

- A state appropriation of \$49 million
- IOLTA program and related funds of more than \$23 million
- Grants and other revenue totaling nearly \$9 million

MLAC awarded a total of \$70,456,031

In addition to funding, MLAC also provides these organizations with support in communications; data and research; diversity, equity, and inclusion; information technology; and program monitoring and evaluation. Detailed financial information, descriptions of the organizations funded, and MLAC's support services to legal aid organizations appear in the following pages.

About Civil Legal Aid

Civil legal aid organizations provide free information, advice, and representation to people with low incomes who otherwise would not receive help with serious legal issues related to housing, health care, immigration, employment, education, family law and domestic violence, disability, consumer benefits, elder issues and more. *To be eligible for MLAC-funded legal services in FY24, a household needed to have an annual income at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level; in 2024, that equated to \$18,825 for an individual and \$39,000 for a family of four.*

Although the U.S. Constitution and the Massachusetts Constitution guarantee most criminal defendants a right to counsel, most people in civil cases do not have that right. That's true even though the consequences of civil cases can be severe: people can lose their homes, health, safety, family, and financial stability—without ever having spoken to a lawyer.

Civil legal aid seeks to ensure that all residents of Massachusetts have access to a lawyer and equal access to justice.

Cases and Clients: FY24

Total cases handled by MLAC-funded organizations: **36,839**

These cases benefited: **81,546 people.**

Cases handled by the **Disability Benefits Project: 928**

These cases secure federal SSI/SSDI benefits for older residents and those with long-term disabilities.

Cases handled by the **Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project: 1,303**

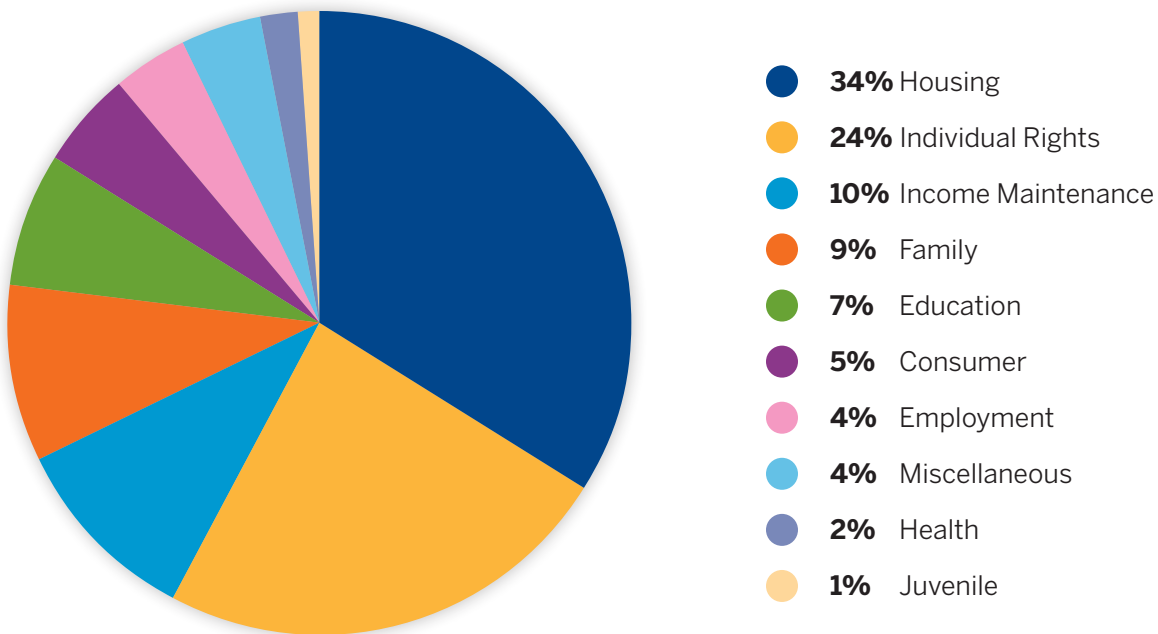
These cases address physical safety, child custody and support, and health care coverage.

Cases handled by the **Medicare Advocacy Project: 185**

These cases assist seniors and people with disabilities.

Case Types

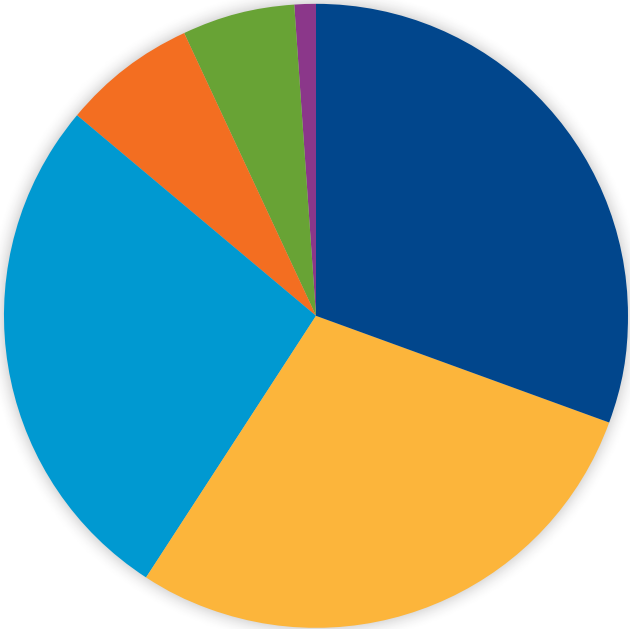
CASES CLOSED FY24



Client Demographics

Race/Ethnicity

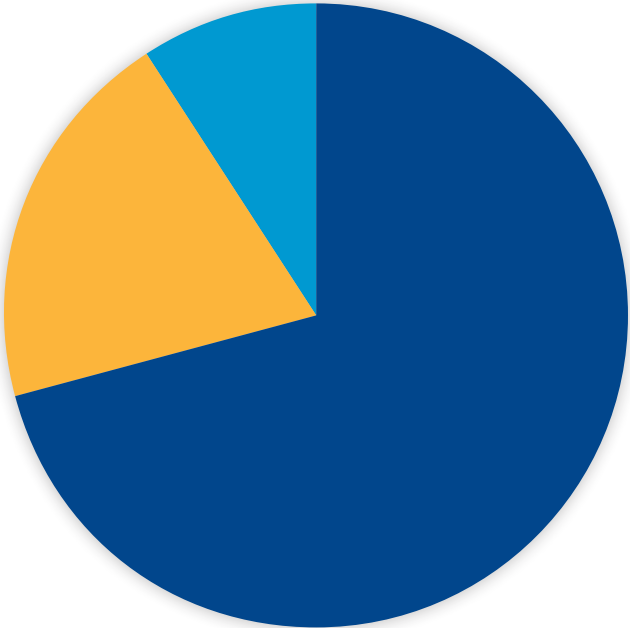
CASES CLOSED FY24



- **31%** Hispanic
- **29%** Black—Not of Hispanic Origin
- **27%** White—Not of Hispanic Origin
- **7%** Asian or Pacific Islander
- **6%** Other
- **<1%** Native American

Age Range

CASES CLOSED FY24



- **71%** 18-59
- **20%** 60 and over
- **9%** Under 18

Serving all of Massachusetts

94% of Massachusetts cities and towns had at least one person with a case handled by a civil legal aid organization

75% of Massachusetts cities and towns had at least 10 people with a case handled by a civil legal aid organization

The few towns that did not have a single person helped by civil legal aid in FY24 are among the least populous in Massachusetts.

Legal Aid Staff

408 Attorneys

117 Paralegals

These numbers represent full-time equivalents (FTEs).

Pro Bono Attorneys

2,092 pro bono attorneys collectively accepted **2,259** cases through legal aid organizations on behalf of residents with low incomes, providing **39,350** hours of pro bono work worth **\$10,607,756**.

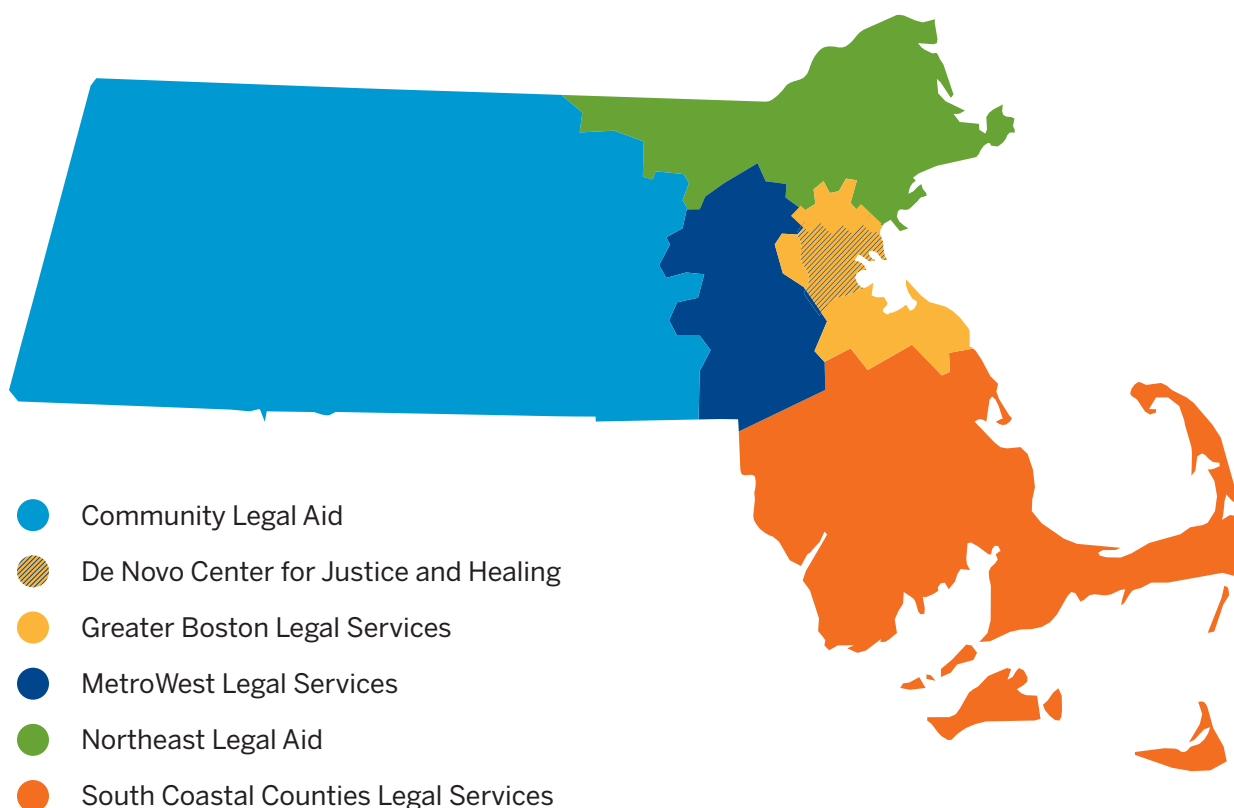
Legal Aid Organizations MLAC Funds

MLAC uses state-appropriated funds (under line item 0321-1600) to support two different types of civil legal aid organizations: regional and statewide.

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Regional organizations help people from a particular geographic area resolve a variety of civil legal problems related to housing, health care, unemployment insurance, public benefits, immigration, domestic violence, and other serious issues.

- **Community Legal Aid**, with offices in Worcester, Northampton, Pittsfield, Springfield, and Fitchburg, serves Central and Western Massachusetts.
- **De Novo Center for Justice and Healing**, based in Cambridge, serves Boston, Cambridge, and interior suburbs of Boston.
- **Greater Boston Legal Services**, with offices in Boston and Cambridge, serves the Greater Boston area.
- **MetroWest Legal Services**, based in Framingham, serves the MetroWest region.
- **Northeast Legal Aid**, with offices in Lawrence, Lowell, and Lynn, serves Essex and Northern Middlesex Counties.
- **South Coastal Counties Legal Services**, with offices in New Bedford, Fall River, Brockton, and Hyannis, serves Cape Cod, the Islands, and Southeastern Massachusetts.



STATEWIDE ORGANIZATIONS

Statewide organizations specialize in specific subjects or types of law and serve people across the Commonwealth. They also provide support to regional organizations.

- **Center for Law and Education** provides expertise on education-related cases.
 - **Center for Public Representation** is dedicated to enforcing and expanding the rights of people with disabilities and others who are in segregated settings.
 - **Children's Law Center of Massachusetts** advocates for the rights of young people across Massachusetts.
 - **Disability Law Center** is the Protection and Advocacy agency for Massachusetts, protecting the rights of people with disabilities.
 - **Massachusetts Advocates for Children** represents children, students, and youth who face significant barriers because of their economic status, disability, race, ethnicity/culture, immigration status, language, and/or traumatic life experiences.
 - **Massachusetts Law Reform Institute** provides statewide advocacy and leadership in advancing laws, policies, and practices that secure economic, racial, and social justice for people with low incomes and their communities.
 - **National Consumer Law Center** advises on a variety of consumer law issues, including student loans, debt collection, disaster protection, mortgages, and consumer protection.
 - **Political Asylum/Immigration Representation (PAIR) Project** provides legal services to asylum seekers and promotes the rights of detained immigrants.
 - **Prisoners' Legal Services** protects the health and civil rights of people who are incarcerated in Massachusetts.
 - **Veterans Legal Services** promotes the self-sufficiency, stability, and financial security of veterans with low incomes and those who are unhoused.
-

Specialized Funding for Immigrants, Victims of Crime, and Other Vulnerable Populations

Massachusetts Immigration Legal Assistance Fund

In 2019, with funding from an anonymous donor, MLAC created the Massachusetts Immigration Legal Assistance Fund (MILAF) to respond to persistent unmet legal needs among vulnerable immigrant and refugee populations in the Commonwealth. MILAF provides funding to organizations that work to fill the gaps within services to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. MILAF's aim is to protect the rights of vulnerable immigrants so they can pursue a stable future. The fund has awarded more than \$3.3 million, including \$625,000 to twelve organizations in FY24, providing direct legal services, community education, and systemic advocacy that benefit large groups of immigrants.

Organizations that received MILAF funds:

Community Legal Aid
Children's Law Center of Massachusetts
De Novo Center for Justice and Healing
Greater Boston Legal Services
Health Law Advocates
Justice at Work
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Northeast Legal Aid
PAIR Project
Prisoners' Legal Services
Rian Immigrant Center
South Coastal Counties Legal Services

Afghan Refugee Project

In 2022, three philanthropic partners provided funding for MLAC to create a program to assist Afghan refugees in filing and completing their legal status applications and resolutions in the Greater Boston area. Additional support was received from two resettlement agencies to fund five dedicated attorneys for this project.

Organizations that received Afghan Refugee Project funds:

Greater Boston Legal Services
MetroWest Legal Services
PAIR Project

Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime

The Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crime (CLAVC) initiative helps victims of crime throughout Massachusetts with their related civil legal problems—including family law, housing, immigration, disability rights, child welfare, education, consumer issues, identity theft, employment rights, and public benefits.

Crime victims often experience difficult legal problems that cannot be addressed in the criminal law system. For example, a victim of an assault may be unable to work, leading to financial distress, including an eviction and debt collection problems. Or, a survivor of domestic violence may need legal help to get a divorce and child support. Jane Doe, Inc. and the National Consumer Law Center provide training and support. MLAC and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute also provide training, support, and overall CLAVC project coordination.

In FY24, the initiative awarded more than \$3.2 million to ten civil legal aid organizations which provide direct legal services to victims of crime.

Organizations that received CLAVC funds:

Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts
Community Legal Aid
De Novo Center for Justice and Healing
Disability Law Center
Greater Boston Legal Services
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
MetroWest Legal Services
Northeast Legal Aid
South Coastal Counties Legal Services
Victim Rights Law Center

Massachusetts Legal Assistance Project

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) received \$5 million in funding through budget line item 0321-1620 of the Acts of 2021 Chapter 102 for the administration of legal services for three legal services projects: The Medical Legal Partnerships Project (MLP), the High-Quality Education for All Project (EDU), and the Family Preservation Project (FPP). Together, these constitute the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Project (MLAP) grant.

MLAC is overseeing the grant through contracts with ten legal aid organizations.

The MLP provides people with low incomes access to legal assistance in a health care setting. The project addresses health-harming legal needs, promotes health equity, and improves overall health outcomes by allying health care providers and attorneys. The EDU works to dismantle barriers to fair, equitable, and high-quality education for students from families with low incomes. The FPP is providing legal assistance and related support services to families at the early stages of involvement with the Department of Children and Families with the goal of keeping families intact.

Organizations that received MLAP funds:

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts

Community Legal Aid

Center for Law and Education

De Novo Center for Justice and Healing

Greater Boston Legal Services

Massachusetts Advocates for Children

MetroWest Legal Services

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Northeast Legal Aid

South Coastal Counties Legal Services

Strengthening the Legal Aid Network

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation strengthens legal aid in the Commonwealth by providing support in several key areas.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

MLAC's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team improves services to clients with low incomes by building cultural competence, addressing diversity-related issues, and promoting equity within MLAC and the civil legal aid organizations it funds. Through education and training, improved hiring practices, statewide events, and collaboration, this initiative spurs legal aid organizations to reflect the diversity of their clients and exemplify our shared values of justice and fairness. The Statewide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council is led by MLAC's Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and consists of staff representatives from legal aid organizations across the Commonwealth. It encourages transparency and communication between MLAC and the organizations it funds and promotes shared solutions to persistent inequities.

Fellowships

The **Racial Justice Fellowship** was created in 2006 to expand the reach of legal aid in communities that have had difficulty obtaining access to the justice system or legal services due to linguistic or cultural barriers. The goal of the fellowship is to use systemic advocacy and other strategies to address pervasive problems of racial injustice, given the disproportionately high rate of poverty in communities of color and the unmet legal needs of these communities. The Racial Justice Fellowship funds a two-year position at legal aid organizations in Massachusetts. In FY24, MLAC funded two Racial Justice Fellows.

The **Bart Gordon Fellowship** helps legal aid organizations enhance their services by providing funding to hire recent law school graduates equipped to assist underserved communities. The fellowship, which rotates among the Massachusetts legal aid organizations that receive MLAC funding, provides financial support to new attorneys qualified to address these barriers. One new Bart Gordon Fellow is funded each year for a one-year term (with an option to renew for a second year). Bart J. Gordon was a Springfield attorney and a founding member of the MLAC Board of Directors. This fellowship program was renamed in his honor after his passing in 1995. In FY24, MLAC funded three Bart Gordon Fellows.

Central Technology Project

The Central Technology Project seeks to standardize technology for MLAC-funded legal aid organizations in Massachusetts. It provides Help Desk services, user support, and training to staff within those organizations. The staff of the Central Technology Project oversees computer hardware and software, telephone and internet service, video conferencing, and networks.

Data and Analysis

MLAC's Data and Analysis team collects and analyzes a wide range of information about legal aid organizations funded by MLAC as well as the clients they serve. With that data, the team reports on the legal aid workforce (e.g., workforce diversity, areas of practice, language ability, and experience) and the impact the workforce is having on behalf of people with low incomes (e.g., improved safety, health, income, housing, and more). The team then recommends new goals and strategies for addressing current and emerging legal needs.

Program Evaluation

MLAC conducts grantee program evaluations using a peer review model that engages attorneys and other professionals skilled in organizational development and legal aid service delivery. Performance standards are drawn from the American Bar Association's *Standards for the Delivery of Civil Legal Services* and cover six areas of focus: strategic planning and collaborative priority setting; development and utilization of resources; client access; quality assurance; management, administration, and use of technology; and governance.

Communications

MLAC's Communications team develops content and campaigns that promote awareness of civil legal aid and the work of MLAC grantees through client storytelling and data. Additionally, it supports efforts to increase communications and media outreach capacity within legal services on a statewide basis by convening regular meetings with legal aid organization communications and development staff and facilitating information exchange through a quarterly email newsletter.

The Equal Justice Coalition

The Equal Justice Coalition (EJC) is a collaboration between the Massachusetts Bar Association, Boston Bar Association, and MLAC. The EJC includes representatives from bar associations, law firms, and legal services programs across the Commonwealth who together work to protect and increase the state appropriation for civil legal aid (MLAC budget line item 0321-1600).

Client Story

Civil legal aid helps caretaker secure affordable and accessible housing

As the primary caretaker for her adult son, who suffers from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, which is a terminal illness, Ms. Gonzalez had secured a rental home that was handicap accessible. Her son is so frail that moving him at this point could be fatal. Still, a new landlord pressured her to leave the unit, even though she paid rent on time month after month and took great care of the property. Overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, Livia reached out to legal aid for help.

“I could not have won my case without legal aid,” says Livia, whose attorney helped her obtain a settlement that allows her and her son to remain in the apartment and provides adequate time to find a new home after her son passes. “The system was stacked against my family. But with my attorney, I had faith—and we prevailed.” Overwhelmed with relief, Livia can continue providing a suitable and loving environment for her son.



Livia Gonzalez (middle) poses with her attorneys Michelin Cahill (L) and Marina Abraham (R)

“I could not have won my case without legal aid”

Livia Gonzalez

Activities & Changes in Net Assets

FY24 Revenue

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Appr.	\$49,000,000
Massachusetts IOLTA Committee	
Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts	\$22,333,652
Program Opt-Out Bar Registration Fees	\$843,871
Cy Pres Awards	\$250,182
Pro Hac Vice Fees	\$254,930
Management Fees	\$149,409
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Project	\$2,998,637
Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance	\$3,360,000
Interest and Other Income	\$1,176,075
Donated Services	\$1,027
Net Assets released from purpose restrictions	\$1,311,201
TOTAL	\$81,678,984

MLAC directs its state-appropriated funds to general support, the Disability Benefits Project, the Medicare Advocacy Project, and the Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project.

Net Assets

Beginning of Year: July 1, 2023	End of year: June 30, 2024
\$11,564,903	\$16,435,140

FY24 Expenses

	Program Services	General and Administrative	Total
Personnel and Related Costs			
Salaries	\$1,117,310	\$1,117,109	\$2,234,419
Payroll taxes and fringe benefits	\$227,940	\$410,442	\$638,382
Total Personnel and Related Costs	\$1,345,250	\$1,527,551	\$2,872,801
Grants and Contracts Awarded			
General Support Funding			
Regional and Statewide Organizations	\$53,818,908	—	\$53,818,908
Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project	\$2,437,260	—	\$2,437,260
Disability Benefits Project	\$1,178,888	—	\$1,178,888
Medicare Advocacy Project	\$446,980	—	\$446,980
Forgivable Loan Disbursements	\$117,964	—	\$117,964
Other Grants			
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Project	\$6,124,079	—	\$6,124,079
Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance	\$3,210,811	—	\$3,210,811
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$1,259,534	—	\$1,259,534
Website	\$803,235	—	\$803,235
Central Technology	\$484,039	—	\$484,039
Farmworkers	\$75,000	—	\$75,000
Language Access Program	\$100,000	—	\$100,000
Fellowships	\$399,333	—	\$399,333
Total Grants and Contracts Awarded	\$70,456,031	—	\$70,456,031
Other			
Professional Services	\$1,327,079	\$336,880	\$1,663,959
Occupancy	\$132,523	\$408,065	\$540,588
Other Support Services	\$497,760	\$67,129	\$564,889
Office and Other	\$13,873	\$76,952	\$90,825
Depreciation	—	\$4,828	\$4,828
Travel	\$6,668	\$844	\$7,512
Total Other	\$1,977,903	\$894,698	\$2,872,601
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$73,779,184	\$2,422,249	\$76,201,433

MLAC Fiscal Year 2024 Grants: \$70,456,031

Regional Organizations

Community Legal Aid

General Support	\$12,266,924
MLAP	\$1,193,247
Special Projects	\$1,079,732
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$645,159
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$60,000
Fellowship	\$170,000
Farmworkers	\$75,000
TOTAL	\$15,490,062

De Novo Center for Justice and Healing

General Support	\$318,104
MLAP	\$232,091
Special Projects	\$24,704
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$146,413
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$47,500
TOTAL	\$768,812

Greater Boston Legal Services

General Support	\$13,591,339
MLAP	\$1,245,609
Special Projects	\$1,296,108
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$596,605
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$286,767
Technology	\$268,115
TOTAL	\$17,284,543

MetroWest Legal Services

General Support	\$2,245,400
MLAP	\$415,289
Special Projects	\$174,380
Victims of a Crime Act Funding	\$114,757
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$291,922
Technology	\$27,424
TOTAL	\$3,269,172

Northeast Legal Aid

General Support	\$6,849,960
MLAP	\$1,029,049
Special Projects	\$549,156
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$409,336
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$47,500
TOTAL	\$8,885,001

South Coastal Counties Legal Services

General Support	\$7,656,512
MLAP	\$986,124
Special Projects	\$673,924
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$393,005
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$47,500
Fellowship	\$71,000
TOTAL	\$9,828,065

Statewide Organizations**Center for Law and Education**

General Support	\$496,672
Technology Grant	\$9,981
MLAP	\$215,517
Fellowship	\$58,333
TOTAL	\$780,503

Center for Public Representation

General Support	\$721,632
Technology Grant	\$12,638
TOTAL	\$734,270

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts

General Support	\$605,626
MLAP	\$366,070
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$128,644
Immigrant and Refugee rights Funding	\$45,000
TOTAL	\$1,145,340

Disability Law Center

General Support	\$993,344
Special Projects	\$182,256
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$93,385
Technology	\$10,877
TOTAL	\$1,279,862

Massachusetts Advocates for Children

General Support	\$392,372
MLAP	\$240,101
TOTAL	\$632,473

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

General Support	\$5,960,056
MLAP	\$200,982
Special Projects	\$82,868
Websites Project	\$809,136
Language Access Project	\$100,000
Victims of a Crime Act Funding	\$233,032
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$20,000
Technology	\$137,936
TOTAL	\$7,544,010

National Consumer Law Center

General Support	\$424,492
TOTAL	\$424,492

PAIR Project

General Support	\$384,380
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$198,346
Technology	\$10,361
TOTAL	\$593,087

Prisoners' Legal Services

General Support	\$645,676
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$47,500
Fellowship	\$100,000
TOTAL	\$793,176

Veterans Legal Services

General Support	\$384,380
Technology	\$6,709
TOTAL	\$391,089

Victims of Crime Act Funding

MLAC provides Victims of Crime Act funding from the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance to the Statewide and Regional Organizations noted above and to:

Victim Rights Law Center: **\$444,574**

Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding

MLAC provides Immigrant and Refugee Rights funding to the Statewide and Regional Organizations noted above and to the organizations:

MASSACHUSETTS IMMIGRATION LEGAL ASSISTANCE FUND

Health Law Advocates: **\$47,500**

Justice at Work: **\$60,000**

Rian Immigrant Center: **\$60,000**

GUIDE TO TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

General Support

Funds are from the state appropriation.

Special Projects

Funds are from the state appropriation.

- Disability Benefits Project—**\$1,178,888**
- Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project—**\$2,437,260**
- Medicare Advocacy Project—**\$446,980**

Victims of Crime Act

Funds are from a federal grant through the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance.

Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding

Funds are from private foundations and refugee resettlement organizations.

- Massachusetts Immigration Legal Assistance Fund (MILAF)
 - Afghan Refugee Project (ARP)
-

MLAC Board and Staff

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