



Report to the Governor and General Court

FY23

September 2023

Introduction

Throughout fiscal year 2023, Massachusetts civil legal aid organizations proved resilient and responsive as they helped thousands of our neighbors secure safety, shelter, and economic stability. When pandemic-era relief programs ended or were reduced, families with low incomes faced urgent challenges that threatened their ability to access basic needs.

MLAC grantees solved issues related to housing instability, food insecurity, vital social services, domestic violence, barriers to employment, and more. Through innovative collaborations with community groups, social service organizations, the courts, private bar attorneys, and other stakeholders, the dedicated staff at Massachusetts legal aid organizations supported residents in need through both individual casework and systemic advocacy initiatives.

The success of these efforts demonstrates the tremendous impact of the state's investment in civil legal aid.

In its FY23 budget, the legislature appropriated \$41 million for civil legal aid. MLAC distributed that funding to 16 statewide and regional legal aid organizations through our grant-funding process.

MLAC also receives money from Interest on Lawyers' Trust Account (IOLTA) funds, as well as from government grants and private foundations. In FY23, MLAC received more than \$13 million from the Massachusetts IOLTA Committee and related funds. Government and foundation grants, including funds for assistance to victims of crime and assistance to indigent immigrants, totaled more than \$9 million. That funding enabled MLAC to distribute additional grants for special projects.

In total, MLAC distributed \$57,139,201.57 in FY23 to organizations across Massachusetts that provide civil legal aid services to people with low incomes.

We are pleased to present this report detailing the role civil legal aid played in expanding access to justice in Massachusetts in FY23.

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MLAC Basics and Background

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation is the largest source for civil legal aid funding 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 low-income people 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 Account (IOLTA) funds, and disburses it to qualified civil legal aid organizations across the Commonwealth.

In FY23, MLAC received revenue from several sources:

- A state appropriation of \$41 million
- IOLTA program and related funds of more than \$13 million
- Grants and other revenue totaling nearly more than \$9 million

MLAC awarded a total of \$57,139,201 in grants.

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, healthcare, immigration, employment, education, family law and domestic violence, disability, consumer problems, and elder issues. *To be eligible for MLAC-funded legal services in FY23, a household would need to have an annual income at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level; in 2023, that equated to \$18,225 for an individual and \$37,500 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: FY23

Total cases handled by MLAC-funded organizations: **42,853**

These cases **benefited 95,648** people.

Cases handled by the **Disability Benefits Project: 956**

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

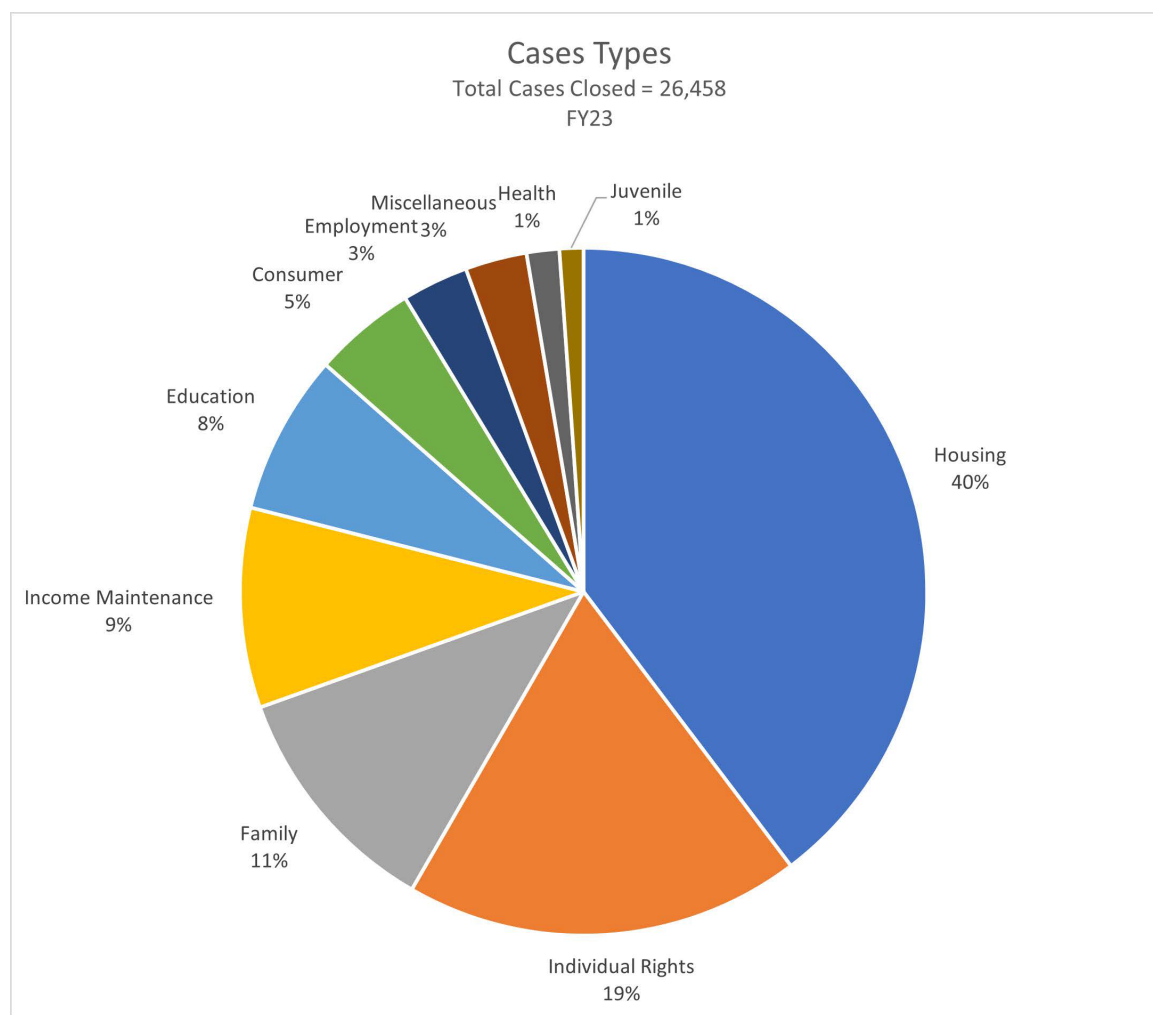
Cases handled by the **Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project: 1,571**

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

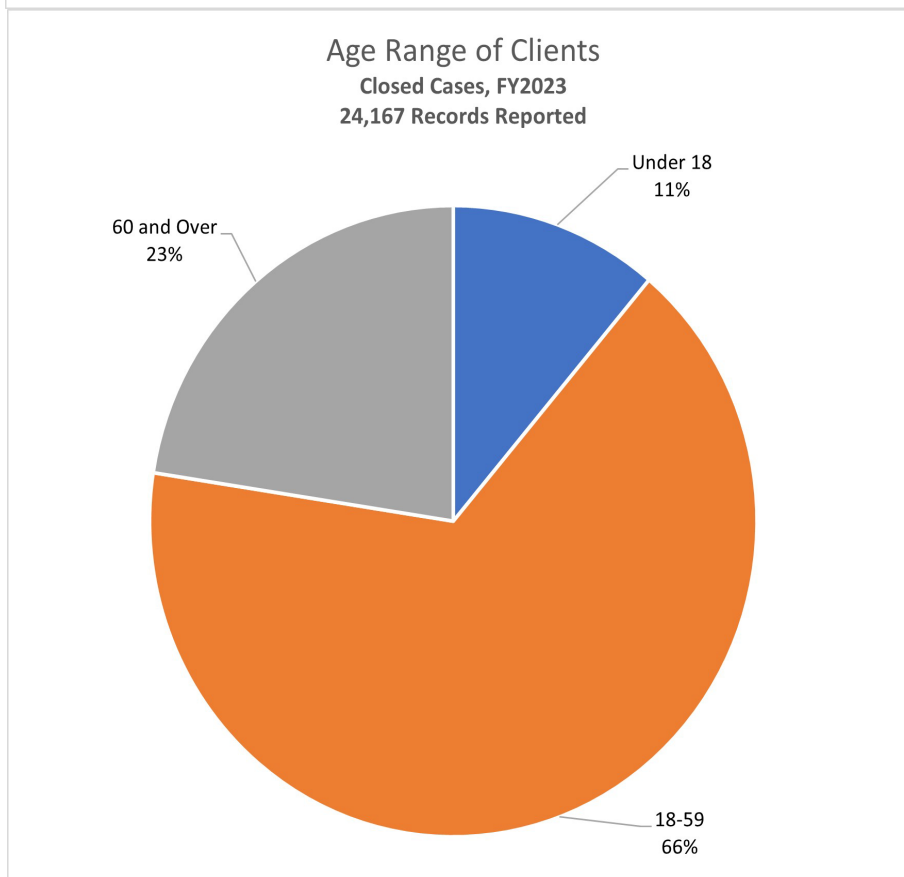
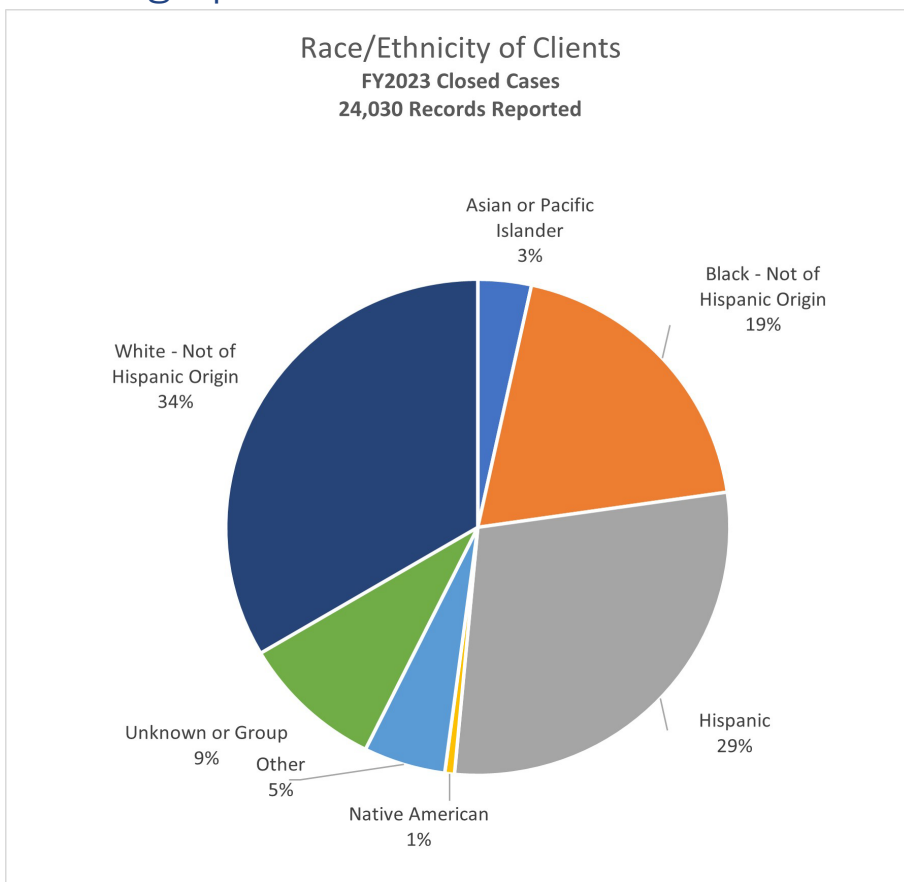
Cases handled by the **Medicare Advocacy Project: 196**

These cases assist seniors and people with disabilities.

Case Types



Client Demographics



Serving all of Massachusetts

95% of Massachusetts cities and towns had at least one person with a case handled by a civil legal aid organization

66% 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 FY23 are among the least populous in Massachusetts.

Legal Aid Staff

421 Attorneys

132 Paralegals

These numbers represent full-time equivalents (FTEs).

Pro Bono Attorneys

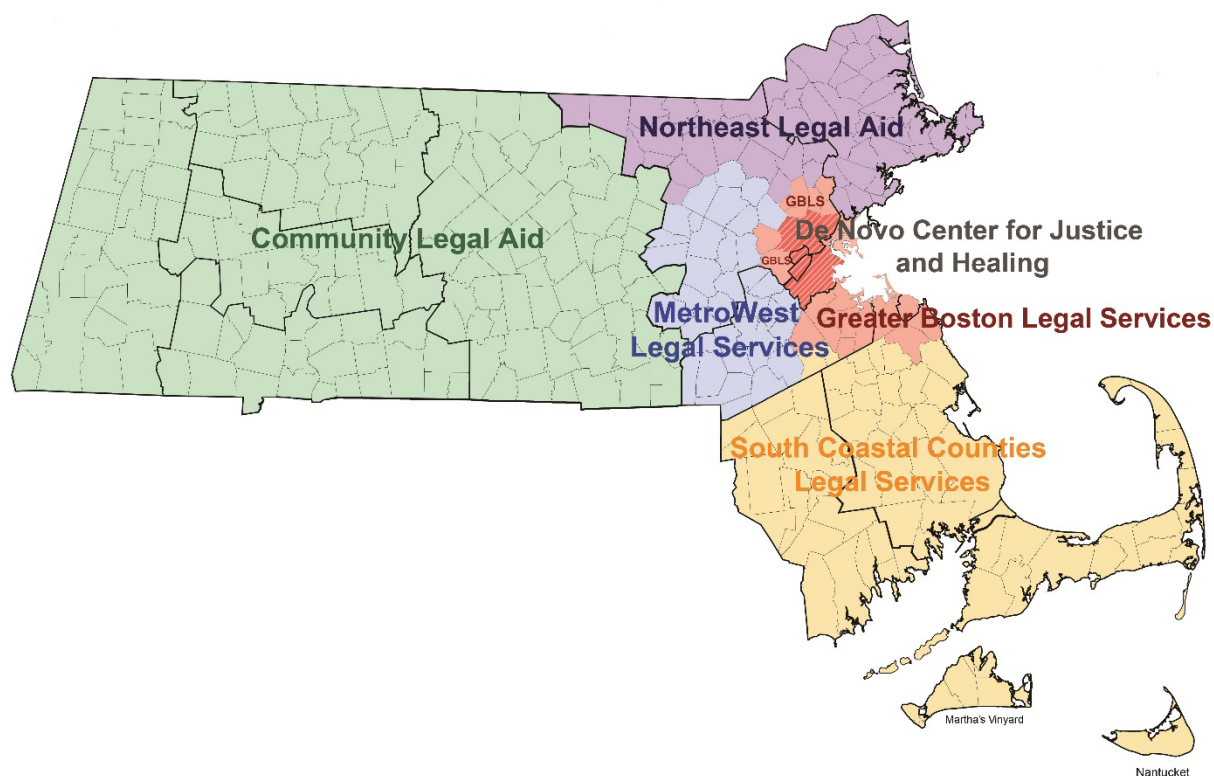
2,278 pro bono attorneys collectively accepted **2,468** cases through legal aid organizations on behalf of residents with low incomes, providing **42,341** hours of pro bono work worth **\$8,391,785 million**.

Legal Aid Organizations MLAC Funds

MLAC uses state-appropriated funds to support two different types of civil legal aid organizations: regional and statewide.

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 specialize in specific subjects or types of law and serve people across the Commonwealth. They also provide support to the 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.
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Specialized Funding for Immigrants, Victims of Crime, and Other Vulnerable Populations

Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund

MLAC created the Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund (GBIDF) in 2017 in partnership with the City of Boston Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement, the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, and a group of foundations. The fund supports legal aid and community organizations that represent and provide legal information to immigrants facing deportation who cannot afford a lawyer. The Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund leverages national funding support as a member of the Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees' nationwide Delivering on the Dream Initiative. The fund has awarded more than \$3 million since its inception. In FY23, it awarded \$282,000 to a network of six legal aid and six community organizations that are building the capacity of Eastern Massachusetts to protect vulnerable immigrants, refugees, and temporary status holders while responding to federal policy shifts.

Organizations that receive GBIDF funds:

Brazilian Worker Center
Catholic Social Services of Fall River
Centro Presente
Essex County Community Organization
Greater Boston Legal Services
Immigrant Family Services Institute
La Colaborativa
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
MetroWest Legal Services
Northeast Legal Aid
PAIR Project
South Coastal Counties Legal Services

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 million, including \$675,000 to twelve organizations in FY23, 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, 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 FY23, the initiative awarded more than \$4 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

In June of 2022, the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) received a \$5 million, multi-year grant from the Massachusetts State Legislature to fund three special 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 healthcare 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
DeNovo 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 FY23, MLAC funded one Racial Justice Fellow.

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. (There is 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 FY23, MLAC funded two 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: 1) the legal aid workforce (e.g., workforce diversity, areas of practice, language ability, and experience) and 2) 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 created by 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 Stories

Civil legal aid helps young immigrant escape violence and achieve her dreams



When Simi was five years old, her parents were killed during a terrorist raid in her Nigerian hometown. Her home life remained unstable for many years. When she was 16, she earned a scholarship to a summer program in New England, and while she was there, her family was displaced for the third time because of religious-based violence. Simi then made the hardest decision of her life: she chose to stay in the United States and seek asylum here on her own.

She connected with the Children's Law Center of Massachusetts and attorney Jay McManus took her case. With Jay's help, Simi was placed in a foster home, enrolled in school, and secured a green card in 2019. She went on to graduate from Wesleyan University and now works in the financial services industry.

Civil legal aid helps South Shore resident keep the unemployment assistance he rightfully deserved

Jim works in the bathroom remodeling business. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, Jim knew that he could not risk his health by going into people's homes, so he filed for unemployment insurance. His application was approved and he began receiving monthly benefits—until one day, he got a letter stating he needed to repay more than \$35,000.

A MetroWest Legal Services attorney represented Jim at a hearing, and the judge ruled him eligible to receive unemployment insurance. Thanks to this assistance, Jim did not have to repay the money he had received.



Activities & Changes in Net Assets

FY23 Revenue

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Appropriation	\$41,000,000
Massachusetts IOLTA Committee	
Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA)	\$13,054,981
Program Opt-Out Bar Registration Fees	\$878,796
Cy Pres Awards	\$1,563,232
Pro Hac Vice Fees	\$240,986
Management Fees	\$150,210
MLAP	\$2,001,363
Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance (MOVA) Grant	\$4,260,311
Interest and Other Income	\$728,536
Donated Services	\$32,405
Net assets released from purpose restrictions	\$1,501,305
Total Revenue	\$65,412,125

MLAC directs all 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, 2021	\$ 9,366,774
End of Year: June 30, 2022	\$ 11,564,903

FY23 Expenses

	Program Services	General and Administrative	Total
Personnel and Related Costs:			
Salaries	\$ 1,016,210	\$ 1,017,958	\$ 2,034,168
Payroll taxes and fringe benefits	237,091	316,275	553,366
<i>Total personnel and related costs</i>	<i>1,253,301</i>	<i>1,334,233</i>	<i>2,587,534</i>
Grants and Contracts Awarded:			
General Support Funding			
Regional and Statewide Organizations	44,255,061		44,255,061
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	81,811		81,811
Other Grants			
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Project (MLAP)	1,926,363		1,926,363
Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance (MOVA)	4,104,519		4,104,519
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	1,415,472		1,415,472
Website	398,115		398,115
Central Technology	443,732		443,732
Farmworkers	75,000		75,000
Language Access Program	100,000		100,000
Fellowships	276,000		276,000
<i>Total grants and contracts awarded</i>	<i>\$ 57,139,201</i>		<i>\$57,139,201</i>
Other:			
Professional Services	1,534,337	345,197	1,879,534
Occupancy	133,908	389,553	523,461
Other Support Services	492,324	26,470	518,794
Office and Other	13,479	60,585	74,064
Depreciation		13,857	13,857
Travel	6,448	3,964	10,412
<i>Total other</i>	<i>\$2,180,496</i>	<i>839,626</i>	<i>3,020,122</i>
Total Expenses	\$ 60,572,998	\$ 2,173,859	\$ 62,746,857

MLAC Fiscal Year 2023 Grants:

\$57,139,201

Regional Organizations

Community Legal Aid

General Support	\$10,033,254
MLAP	\$518,346
Special Projects	\$1,040,520
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$828,075
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$67,000
Fellowship	\$70,000
Farmworkers	\$75,000
Total	\$12,632,195

De Novo Center for Justice and Healing

General Support	\$271,998
MLAP	\$57,117
Special Projects	\$25,700
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$193,278
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$57,000
Total	\$605,093

Greater Boston Legal Services

General Support	\$11,390,032
MLAP	\$261,455
Special Projects	\$1,319,692
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$755,287
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$210,955
Technology	\$250,215
Total	\$14,152,150

MetroWest Legal Services

General Support	\$1,687,479
MLAP	\$201,986
Special Projects	\$159,428
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$143,410
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$233,871
Technology	\$24,646
Total	\$2,450,820

Northeast Legal Aid

General Support	\$5,561,462
MLAP	\$284,600
Special Projects	\$565,164
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$531,305
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$91,000

Total	\$7,033,531
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South Coastal Counties Legal Services

General Support	\$6,104,674
MLAP	\$144,962
Special Projects	\$653,680
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$530,872
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$91,000

Total	\$7,513,317
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Statewide Organizations

Center for Law and Education

General Support	\$424,510
Technology Grant	\$9,133
MLAP	\$99,984
Fellowship	\$71,000

Total	\$604,627
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Center for Public Representation

General Support	\$721,671
Special Projects	\$33,820
Technology Grant	\$15,634

Total	\$771,125
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Children's Law Center of Massachusetts

General Support	\$509,748
MLAP	\$169,635
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$167,671
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$50,000

Total	\$897,054
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Disability Law Center

General Support	\$849,025
Special Projects	\$182,256
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$106,280
Technology Grant	\$16,286

Total	\$1,153,847
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Massachusetts Advocates for Children

General Support	\$335,365
MLAP	\$141,473

Total	\$476,838
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Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

General Support	\$5,094,140
MLAP	\$46,805
Special Projects	\$82,868
Websites Project	\$398,115
Language Access Project	\$100,000
Victims of Crime Act Funding	\$297,770
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$35,000
Technology Grant	\$118,421

Total	\$6,173,119
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National Consumer Law Center

General Support	\$424,513
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Total	\$424,513
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PAIR Project

General Support	\$125,714
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$229,646
Technology	\$3,131

Total	\$358,491
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Prisoners' Legal Services

General Support	\$551,864
Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding	\$57,000
Fellowship	\$135,000

Total	\$734,864
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Veterans Legal Services

General Support	\$251,430
Technology	\$6,262

Total	\$257,692
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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 \$550,567

Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding

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

Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund

Brazilian Worker Center	\$17,000
Catholic Social Services of Fall River	\$17,000
Centro Presente	\$17,000
Chelsea Collaborative (La Colaborativa)	\$17,000
Essex County Community Organization	\$17,000
Immigrant Family Services Institute	\$17,000

Massachusetts Immigration Legal Assistance Fund

Health Law Advocates	\$57,000
Justice at Work	\$67,000
Rian Immigrant Center	\$67,000

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** to eight organizations
- Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project - **\$2,437,260** to seven organizations
- Medicare Advocacy Project - **\$446,980** to three organizations

Victims of Crime Act Funding

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

Immigrant and Refugee Rights Funding

Funds are from private foundations, the City of Boston and refugee resettlement organizations.

- Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund (GBIDF)
- Massachusetts Immigration Legal Assistance Fund (MILAF)
- Afghan Refugee Project (ARP)

MLAC Board and Staff

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