

Annual Report



Equal justice for the Commonwealth



Massachusetts
Legal
Assistance
Corporation

FISCAL YEAR
2014

Dear friends of legal aid,

It was a landmark year for civil legal aid in Massachusetts in FY 2014. MLAC received a \$1 million increase in the state's FY14 budget, an increase that will allow more low-income individuals and families in our state to access the legal advice and representation they need and deserve. Despite this progress, civil legal aid programs around the state are still dealing with fallout from the collapse in funding from the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) which dropped from \$17 million in 2008 to just \$3.48 million this year.

Our legal aid grantees have been resourceful and resilient in finding ways to cut costs in response to this prolonged funding crisis. In FY14, for example, Community Legal Aid merged with the Massachusetts Justice Project and became the Legal Services Corporation's sole grantee for the five counties of central and western Massachusetts. In the northeastern part of the state, Merrimack Valley Legal Services and Neighborhood Legal Services merged to form Northeast Legal Aid.

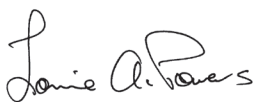
Despite these efforts, a significant and serious access to justice gap exists in Massachusetts, as tens of thousands of eligible residents are turned away by civil legal aid programs that lack the resources to serve them. Even so, our 16 grantees closed a combined total of 24,225 cases in FY14. Each case represents a moment of life-changing significance for an individual or family, as they seek assistance in resolving issues related to basic necessities such as housing, employment, classroom accommodations for children with disabilities, and conflicts related to child support and custody, divorce, and domestic violence.

This work would not be possible without the capable stewardship of our Board of Directors. We are grateful for the service of longtime board members Judith Martinez, Maria Matos, and Bill Newman, who completed their service this year. This year, we welcomed a new board chair, Marijane Benner Browne, and three new board members: Salea Perry, an affordable housing advocate and member of Greater Boston Legal Services' Board of Directors; Dr. Guillermo Gonzalez, a psychiatrist in private practice; and Hon. Geoffrey Wilson, who recently retired as Presiding Justice of the Franklin County Probate and Family Court. All are strong advocates for the rights of low-income individuals and families, and both Gonzalez and Wilson previously served on the boards of MLAC-funded legal aid programs.

Despite persistent funding challenges, the civil legal aid community remains committed to equal justice for all and hopeful that a brighter and more just future exists for all residents of the Commonwealth. As always, we are grateful to the attorneys and staff who work tirelessly to make justice attainable for those in need and to the courageous clients who remind us daily why this struggle is worthwhile. As you read the following pages, we hope that their stories of strength and resilience will inspire you as they have inspired us.



Marijane Benner Browne
Chair



Lonnie A. Powers
Executive Director



FY 2014 Accomplishments

The civil legal aid programs funded by MLAC provide free legal information, advice, and representation to low-income individuals and families facing critical, non-criminal legal problems in matters of housing, employment, domestic violence, educational accommodations, and many others.

24,225
CASES CLOSED



74,432
PEOPLE HELPED

Securing Family Safety

The Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project closed

1,924 cases

resolving legal issues involving physical safety, financial security, child support and custody, and other concerns.

Attaining Financial Independence

The Disability Benefits Project closed

944 cases

bringing in more than **\$6.1 million** in new federal revenue for clients and the Commonwealth.

Increasing Access to Health Care

The Medicare Advocacy Project assisted

484 elders

and people with disabilities in receiving health care coverage which they had been wrongly denied.



New federal revenue for civil legal aid clients won by MLAC-funded organizations totaled

\$8.6 million

Potential savings for the state as a result of MLAC advocacy is estimated to be

\$14.3 million

including **\$8.5 million** in avoided shelter costs for low-income residents facing eviction



MLAC-funded organizations employed

199 attorneys **50** paralegals

(full-time equivalents)

In FY 2014

722

private attorneys collectively donated

46,577

hours of assistance through MLAC-funded programs, representing a value of more than

\$10.4 million

Stories of Impact

Helping a domestic violence survivor stabilize her life

When Sarah* and John first met, things were great for the couple. They moved in together, and had a beautiful son. Soon after, John became abusive and unpredictable. He was considerate one moment, and violent and angry the next. After their second son was born, the abuse continued. John threatened to kill Sarah and harm the children. After enduring one particularly violent night, Sarah called the police, who arrested John.



“[My legal aid attorney] was my backbone when I didn’t feel like I had one.”

The police who arrested John referred her to South Coastal Counties Legal Services (SCCLS). As police and prosecutors worked in criminal court to put John behind bars, SCCLS was there to help her get a permanent restraining order and full custody of her sons. When Sarah received an eviction order because John had stopped paying rent, SCCLS helped get the back rent paid from his pension plan and assisted Sarah in finding affordable housing. Meanwhile, in criminal court, John was sentenced to six to eight years in prison.

Thanks to civil legal aid, Sarah and her sons can now live a stable life free from the threat of violence. Said Sarah, “Thanks to SCCLS my children and I got our lives back, not only financially but emotionally. [My legal aid attorney] was my backbone when I didn’t feel like I had one. I couldn’t have done this without her.”

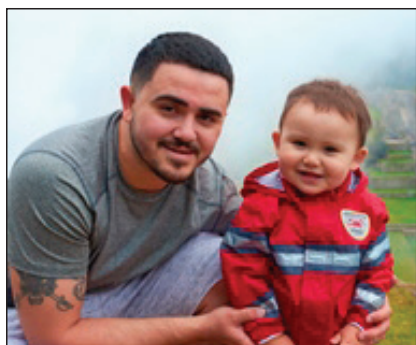
Supporting a veteran who faced discrimination at work

After returning from Afghanistan, Carl*, a Marine Corps veteran, was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He longed to return to the normalcy of civilian life. When a temp agency called with a job offer, he jumped at the chance.

Carl had only been at his job for a month when the harassment began. For nearly six months, Carl’s supervisor berated him and threatened to fire him, saying he believed Carl thought he was better than everyone else because he was an ex-Marine. Carl felt ashamed and humiliated, thinking he wasn’t tough enough to handle it. When Carl’s supervisor bragged that he had guns and knew how to use them, Carl’s nightmares and memories of his deployment came flooding back, and he decided to quit. He pleaded with the temp agency to reassign him to a new supervisor, or even to a different employer, but they had nothing to offer.

“Having legal representation was life-saving... It really turned my life around.”

Hoping to minimize the stress until he found a job, Carl applied for Unemployment Insurance. The Division of Unemployment Assistance denied Carl’s application, saying he had abandoned his job without good cause. Carl decided to appeal the decision, not knowing he would have to wait months until his hearing date. Carl continued his job search, but with no money coming in, the bills began to pile up. The family was forced to spend its savings and rely on credit cards to make ends meet. With his wife in nursing school full time, they had no income, and soon defaulted on the payments, which negatively affected their credit. Not working made Carl feel emasculated, exacerbating his PTSD so that he finally sought help from a mental health counselor. What Carl wanted most of all—to provide for his family so they could be proud of him—was slipping out of his grasp. Carl’s counselor suggested he contact MetroWest Legal Services (MWLS).



An MWLS attorney represented Carl at the appeal hearing, where the review examiner ruled in Carl’s favor and overturned the denial, allowing Carl to receive retroactive unemployment benefits. Soon after, Carl began receiving ongoing benefits, allowing him to pay down his debts and support his family while he continued to search for work. In a stroke of good luck, a few weeks after the hearing, Carl found a full-time job.

Carl is extremely grateful for the help he received from MetroWest Legal Services. “I was trying to do everything right to support my family, and then my whole life turned upside down. Getting denied unemployment felt like a slap in the face. Having legal representation was life-saving. It helped me get a sense of justice after everything I had been through. It really turned my life around.”

* Names have been changed to protect client privacy.

Keeping a family together after tragedy

Barbara was a single mother of one adult and two minor children. She had lived in public housing for several years with her two youngest children when she was diagnosed with cancer. Her daughter Michelle, 19, moved back in to help care for her half-siblings. Barbara contacted the Housing Authority (HA) and asked to have Michelle added to her household.

A few months after sending the request to the HA, Barbara's health worsened suddenly and she died. A few weeks later the HA notified Michelle that her addition to the household had been approved. Shortly thereafter the HA learned of Barbara's death and notified the family that they would be evicted, because Michelle was not an approved 'head of household.' Michelle was terrified. She was working part time while going to school and raising two young children. She would not be able to keep the family together if they were evicted, as she could not afford market-rate rent on an apartment large enough for all of them.

Michelle appealed the HA decision to an administrative hearing, which she lost. After the HA filed an eviction action in court, Michelle contacted Merrimack Valley North Shore Legal Services (now Northeast Legal Aid). Her legal aid attorney represented the family and persuaded the judge that the eviction was improper and that the family had the right to remain. As part of his order, the judge required that a social worker visit the apartment; the social worker reported that the apartment was clean and the children seemed happy and well cared for. Without civil legal aid it is likely that the two youngest children would have been placed in foster care, adding more trauma to the children and additional costs to the state.

Building Support



Attorney General Martha Coakley at the 2014 Captains' Breakfast.

In addition to providing funding and other support to legal aid programs throughout the state, MLAC serves as a voice for the legal aid community in Massachusetts. Working with the Boston and Massachusetts Bar Associations, law firms, and advocates around the state, MLAC is at the forefront of a campaign to increase funding for civil legal aid, so that all eligible residents who seek legal advice and representation can access it. We continue to partner with bar associations, legal aid programs, and community organizations in legislative advocacy efforts directed by The Equal Justice Coalition.



From left: MLAC Executive Director Lonnie Powers, Senator Karen Spilka, Representative Kate Hogan, Representative Ruth Balsler, and MLAC board member Rahsaan Hall at the 2014 Legislative Recognition Reception.

MLAC works closely with the legislature to increase access to justice for low-income individuals and families in Massachusetts. In 2014, we co-hosted a Legislative Recognition Reception with the Equal Justice Coalition to honor legislative leaders for their support of equal justice for all in the Commonwealth. Senator Stephen Brewer, Congresswoman Katherine Clark, Senate President Therese Murray, and former Representative Eugene O'Flaherty received Champion of Justice Awards for their longstanding support of civil legal aid. Representatives Robert DeLeo and Brian Dempsey received the Beacon of Justice Awards for their efforts to secure additional funding for legal aid in the FY 15 state budget.



Left: Chief Justice Roderick Ireland speaks to the assembled crowd at the 15th Annual Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid. Right: Equal Justice Coalition Chair John Carroll welcomes attendees.



In January, more than 500 attorneys gathered at the Massachusetts State House for the 15th Annual Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid, hosted by the Equal Justice Coalition. Chief Justice Roderick Ireland of the Supreme Judicial Court addressed the crowd, calling the annual advocacy event a crucial part of the effort to balance the scales of justice. Malden resident Charlene Julce also spoke, sharing the vital role civil legal aid played in preventing her from losing her home.

FY 2014 Grants to Programs

REGIONAL PROGRAMS

Central/West Region

Community Legal Aid	
General Support	\$2,351,764
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$739,517
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project	\$667,520
Disability Benefits Project	\$247,060
Medicare Advocacy Project	\$96,556
Fellowship	\$70,560
Farmworkers	\$20,000
Total	\$4,192,977

Eastern Region

Boston College Legal Services LAB	
Disability Benefits Project	\$18,028
Total	\$18,028

Community Legal Services & Counseling Center	
General Support	\$76,176
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project	\$21,168
Disability Benefits Project	\$9,148
Total	\$106,492

Greater Boston Legal Services	
General Support	\$2,676,887
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project	\$766,096
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$452,769
Disability Benefits Project	\$309,584
Medicare Advocacy Project	\$289,288
Technology Grants and Equipment	\$168,640
Fellowship	\$50,000
Total	\$4,713,264

MetroWest Legal Services	
General Support	\$367,952
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$111,069
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project	\$100,556
Disability Benefits Project	\$46,116
Technology Grants and Equipment	\$22,932
Total	\$648,625

Northeast Region

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts	
General Support	\$114,724
Technology Grants and Equipment	\$1,838
Total	\$116,562

Merrimack Valley Legal Services	
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project	\$376,396
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$142,157
Total	\$518,553

Neighborhood Legal Services*	
General Support	\$1,232,352
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$183,036
Disability Benefits Project	\$159,208
Special Grants	\$95,030
Total	\$1,669,626

Southeast Region

South Coastal Counties Legal Services	
General Support	\$1,421,683
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project	\$422,660
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$280,450
Disability Benefits Project	\$172,100
Medicare Advocacy Project	\$61,136
Total	\$2,358,029

STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

Center for Law and Education	
General Support	\$102,548
Fellowship	\$78,333
Technology Grants and Equipment	\$6,859
Total	\$187,740

Center for Public Representation	
General Support	\$174,332
Disability Benefits Project	\$35,396
Technology Grants and Equipment	\$8,479
Total	\$218,207

Disability Law Center	
General Support	\$205,100
Disability Benefits Project	\$182,256
Technology Grants and Equipment	\$9,707
Total	\$397,063

Massachusetts Advocates for Children	
General Support	\$81,016
Total	\$81,016

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute	
General Support	\$1,230,600
Website	\$282,433
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project	\$82,868
Technology Grants and Equipment	\$91,775
Fellowship	\$60,000
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$29,653
Total	\$1,777,329

National Consumer Law Center	
General Support	\$102,548
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$313,265
Total	\$415,813

Prisoners' Legal Services	
General Support	\$121,001
Technology Grants and Equipment	\$4,482
Total	\$125,483

Volunteer Lawyers' Project	
Attorney General - HomeCorps	\$53,661
Total	\$53,661

\$17,598,468 total

* One month of grants to Northeast Legal Aid, formed by the June 2014 merger of Merrimack Valley Legal Services and Neighborhood Legal Services, are included in the total for Neighborhood Legal Services.

Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

FY2014

APPROPRIATED PROJECTS

	Disability Benefits Project	Medicare Advocacy Project	Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project	General Support	IOLTA Committee	Attorney General HomeCorps	Program Support Initiatives	IOLTA Administrative Services	MLAC Administrative	Total all funds
Commonwealth of Massachusetts, SJC*	\$1,178,896	\$446,980	\$2,437,264	\$8,936,860						\$13,000,000
Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts					\$3,481,026	\$2,305,577				\$3,481,026
Commonwealth of Massachusetts, HomeCorps					\$753,932		\$171,177		\$32,942	\$2,305,577
Opt-out bar registration fees									\$142,134	\$753,932
Interest and other income					\$141,722			\$66,973		\$204,119
Donated legal services						\$45,000				\$142,134
Pro hac vice fees										\$141,722
Management fees					\$42,822					\$111,973
Cy pres award										\$42,822
Total Revenue	\$1,178,896	\$446,980	\$2,437,264	\$8,936,860	\$4,419,502	\$2,350,577	\$171,177	\$66,973	\$175,076	\$20,183,305

EXPENSES

Grants Awarded	\$1,178,896	\$446,980	\$2,437,264	\$8,858,801	\$2,112,442	\$2,305,577				\$17,339,960
Loan Forgiveness				\$78,066	\$12,335					\$90,401
Salaries						\$42,236	\$399,352	\$13,141	\$542,728	\$997,457
Occupancy							\$21,710	\$48,880	\$206,955	\$277,545
Professional Services							\$381,989		\$308,274	\$690,263
Payroll taxes and fringe benefits							\$100,505	\$4,952	\$133,051	\$238,508
Other support services							\$243,604		\$61,466	\$305,070
Fellowships							\$258,893			\$258,893
Depreciation									\$24,455	\$24,455
Travel									\$18,781	\$24,587
Office										\$4,034
Total expenses before allocation of administrative expense	\$1,178,896	\$446,980	\$2,437,264	\$8,936,867	\$2,124,777	\$2,347,813	\$1,415,893	\$66,973	\$1,295,710	\$20,251,173
Allocation of Administrative Expense	\$78,070	\$29,600	\$161,404	\$591,828	\$292,674				(\$1,153,576)	
Total Expenses	\$1,256,966	\$476,580	\$2,598,668	\$9,528,695	\$2,417,451	\$2,347,813	\$1,415,893	\$66,973	\$142,134	\$20,251,173
Excess (deficiency) of revenue	(\$78,070)	(\$29,600)	(\$161,404)	(\$591,835)	\$2,002,051	\$2,764	(\$1,244,716)	0	\$32,942	(\$67,868)
Net Assets June 30, 2013	0	0	0	0	\$2,693,012	0	0	0	\$27,739	\$2,720,751
Transfer to other funds	\$78,070	\$29,600	\$161,404	\$591,835	(\$2,113,456)	(\$2,764)	\$1,244,716		\$10,595	
Net Assets June 30, 2014					\$2,581,607				\$71,276	\$2,652,883

* Supreme Judicial Court

Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

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