



April 22, 2016

**Women's Bar Association**  
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Massachusetts State House  
24 Beacon Street  
Room 26  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: FY17 House Ways & Means Budget**

**President**  
Kristin W. Shirahama

Dear Representative Zlotnik,

**President-Elect**  
Michele Liu Baillie

The current budget threatens to reduce access to justice with a disproportionate impact on women and children. A state budget with insufficient funding for civil legal services and for the courts during these difficult economic times when the public relies most heavily on them is not a state budget worthy of our great Commonwealth. On behalf of the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts (WBA), we ask for increased funding for Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation and the Trial Court because their budgets impact access to justice for the citizens of Massachusetts.

**Vice President, Membership & Statewide Outreach**  
Bronwyn Roberts

The WBA urges the House to **adopt amendment #847** (Representative Ruth Balser) to increase the HWM recommendation by \$9 million, for a total of \$27 million for civil legal aid, budget line item 0321-1600. We support the call of the BBA Task Force report for a funding increase to correct shameful unmet need. Without a significant increase in funding, civil legal aid programs will continue to be forced to turn away nearly two-thirds of eligible people seeking assistance for serious and complex civil legal issues including child custody, domestic violence, denial of federal benefits, and homelessness.

**Vice President, Operations**  
Marie Chafe

The WBA urges the House to **adopt amendment #474** (Representative John Fernandes) to increase the HWM recommendation by \$14.5 million, for a total of \$252,372,058 to maintain court operations, budget line item 0330-0300. If the Trial Court does not receive a maintenance budget, it will likely have to reduce its workforce by 300 employees which would profoundly impact the system by seriously impeding the ongoing modernization of the judicial branch and reducing the Trial Court's ability to effectively respond in a timely manner to society's need for justice.

**Secretary**  
Nicole Forbes

Additionally, we ask that the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights (DWBOR) continues to include critical protections for au pairs. The WBA urges the House to **reject amendment #1083** (Representative Ann Ferrante) that seeks to exclude au pairs from this crucial law. As a member of the MA Coalition of Domestic Workers, the WBA advocated for the passage of DWBOR. Au pairs are primarily young women between the ages of 18 and 26 who come to the U.S. on State Department issued J-1 Visas to provide 45 hours of flexible, live-in childcare a week for only \$195 a week and a one-time educational stipend of \$500. In 2014, 1,198 au pairs worked in Massachusetts, the fifth largest number in any state. Au pairs are exactly the type of workers the DWBOR was designed to protect and excluding them would leave these young women vulnerable to exploitation. The impact of their exclusion would be wide-reaching, harming other dedicated Massachusetts workers, frustrating the progress we have made, and perpetuating wage inequality.

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The WBA is a professional association of women attorneys and judges, with over 1500 members across the Commonwealth. The WBA was founded in 1978 and is one of the most influential women's bar associations in the nation. We are committed to working towards a more just society and a just society requires that its citizens have access to civil legal services, a properly functioning court system and the protections of minimum wage and domestic worker laws.

**Executive Director**  
Patricia Comfort

Thank you for your consideration.

**Deputy Director**  
Rachel Biscardi

Sincerely,

**Membership & Information Technology Manager**  
Maura Bastarache

**Operations Manager**  
Kimberly Phillips

Kristin W. Shirahama  
President

**Administrative Assistant**  
Elizabeth Yows-Johnson