



June 20, 2017

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Re: Funding for Massachusetts
Legal Assistance Corporation

Dear Members of the Conference Committee:

As the President of the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts (WBA), I ask you to maintain the \$20 million in funding for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) (line item 0321-1600). Maintaining the funding for MLAC, as set forth by the House and Senate, is a key legislative priority for the WBA's membership and will ensure that an already vulnerable population is not left behind in the current fiscal climate.

The funding for MLAC provides support to at-risk populations who otherwise face a complex legal system alone during critically important times in their lives. These populations include families with young children, the elderly, and domestic violence survivors, many of whom are fighting to keep themselves safe, maintain or access housing, or obtain critical safety net benefits or programs.

The need for civil legal aid continues to far exceed the available resources. In Massachusetts, legal aid organizations are forced to turn away 64 percent of eligible recipients who seek help each year due to a lack of funding. And now, on the federal level, President Trump's proposed federal budget threatens to eliminate funding for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), which provides \$5.2 million in grants to civil legal aid programs in Massachusetts. Now is the time for the Commonwealth to ensure that these vulnerable populations are not left behind.

The more than 1500 members of the WBA from across Massachusetts are committed to working towards a more just society. This effort requires that citizens have access to legal services, public counsel and a properly functioning court system. Maintaining the \$20 million level funding for MLAC is essential to ensuring these necessary services. Thank you for your careful consideration of this vitally important budgetary item and for your important work on behalf of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Very truly yours

Michele Liu Baillie
President
Women's Bar Association