

25 years



A milestone in ensuring justice for all



Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

2008 Annual Report

25 Years

The year 2008 marked the 25th anniversary of the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation. In our 25-year history, we have remained true to our vision — a legal aid system in Massachusetts that provides justice to all — both in times of prosperity and times of hardship.

In July 2007 MLAC awarded the largest amount of general support grants in our history due to an increase in revenue from the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program. This increase allowed our programs to respond quickly and effectively to the foreclosure crisis and the impact it has had on Massachusetts communities. For example, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute has provided up-to-date information for homeowners and tenants on MassLegalHelp.org, while Greater Boston Legal Services, Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts and MetroWest Legal Services have partnered with the South Middlesex Opportunity Council to create a Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Office to help families in the region avoid foreclosure.

In May 2008 MLAC celebrated these and other successes with a reception commemorating our 25th anniversary. Nearly 260 guests attended including current and former staff of Massachusetts legal aid programs; current and former

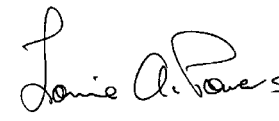
MLAC board members; members of the judiciary and the private bar; and state legislators, Rep. Peter Koutoujian, Rep. Charles Murphy and Sen. Marian Walsh. **Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall** of the Supreme Judicial Court was the event's featured speaker, addressing the audience on the importance of civil legal aid in providing access to justice across the Commonwealth. MLAC also honored longtime community activist and MLAC board member **Ethel "Peggy" Santos** with a lifetime achievement award in honor of her decades of work in helping low-income people.

Soon after, we learned that the Equal Justice Coalition was successful in its 2008 legislative campaign: MLAC was awarded a \$1.4 million increase in the FY09 state budget. That good news was tempered, however, by our learning of steep declines in IOLTA income starting in June 2008 and continuing to date. Thus, despite our many achievements over this past year, the road ahead is not going to be an easy one. In July 2008 we had to reduce the amount of general support grants by \$3.5 million because of the decline in IOLTA income, and MLAC will spend its entire IOLTA reserve during FY09.

Although MLAC's support to programs has decreased, the need for legal aid is greater than ever as families struggle to make ends meet. In the face of tremendous economic uncertainty, we remain committed to the belief that all people in the Commonwealth have a right to justice.


Robert B. Foster, *Chair*




Lonnie A. Powers, *Executive Director*



2008 Program Accomplishments

- 230 attorneys and 60 paralegals (full-time equivalents) at MLAC-funded programs closed 30,104 cases, providing 105,440 low-income individuals and family members with access to justice.
- MLAC-funded programs recruited and trained 659 private attorneys, who collectively donated 24,407 hours of legal advice and representation. The value of their time was \$5,491,575.
- MLAC's Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project helped 2,883 victims of domestic violence begin new lives free from abuse.
- MLAC's Disability Benefits Project won federal SSI/SSDI benefits for clients in 90 percent of cases in which a decision was made, bringing \$849,958 in federal reimbursement to the Commonwealth and \$9,998,812 to clients, which represents a 19.7 percent increase over FY07.
- MLAC's Medicare Advocacy Project helped 888 Massachusetts elders and people with disabilities obtain the Medicare benefits to which they were entitled.

2008 MLAC Accomplishments

- The Publications Clearinghouse funded the development and translation of user-friendly legal information for the MassLegalHelp.org website.
- The Diversity Coalition continued its work to increase the cultural competency of legal services staff. Nearly 230 staff members attended a series of trainings in spring 2008 called Let's Get REAL About Disability.
- MLAC funded Bart J. Gordon Memorial Fellows to improve access to legal assistance for communities whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are barriers to the delivery of legal aid. MLAC also funded Racial Justice Fellows to address pervasive problems of racial injustice through systemic advocacy and other strategies.
- MLAC improved its program monitoring process by enhancing data collection and reporting from programs to gain a better understanding of the impact of services provided.

- The Client Council empowered client board members across the state through ongoing training and education.



On February 28, 2008, nearly 600 attorneys from across the Commonwealth convened at the State House for the 9th Annual Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid.

MLAC

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation is the largest funding source for civil legal aid programs in Massachusetts. It was established by the State Legislature in 1983 to ensure that low-income people with critical non-criminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice and representation. With funding from the Commonwealth and the IOLTA program, MLAC provides grants to 17 local and statewide civil legal aid programs, as well as operational training and support to the Massachusetts legal aid community.

MLAC Board of Directors

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Amanda Sullivan,
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Patricia Swansey, *Program Director*

Wayne Welch, *Network Administrator*

MLAC Grants FY08

EASTERN REGION

Greater Boston Legal Services

General Support: \$6,022,327

Disability Benefits Project: \$340,458

Medicare Advocacy Project: \$394,395

Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project: \$796,792

Technology Grants & Equipment: \$100,446

Fellowships: \$110,854

Total: \$7,765,272

Subgrantees of GBLs:

Community Legal Services and Counseling Center

General Support: \$176,164

Disability Benefits Project: \$31,529

Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project: \$17,533

Technology Grants & Equipment: \$921

Total: \$226,147

MetroWest Legal Services

(formerly South Middlesex Legal Services)

General Support: \$799,409

Disability Benefits Project: \$51,653

Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project: \$104,013

Technology Grants & Equipment: \$12,055

Fellowships: \$59,828

Total: \$1,026,958

CENTRAL/WEST REGION

Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts

General Support: \$2,156,600

Disability Benefits Project: \$98,088

Medicare Advocacy Project: \$36,635

Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project: \$284,154

Technology Grants & Equipment: \$62,599

Total: \$2,638,076

Western Massachusetts Legal Services

General Support: \$3,083,709

Disability Benefits Project: \$118,516

Medicare Advocacy Project: \$48,203

Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project: \$406,310

Technology Grants & Equipment: \$17,866

Total: \$3,674,603

NORTHEAST REGION

Neighborhood Legal Services

General Support: \$2,747,132

Disability Benefits Project: \$148,566

Technology Grants & Equipment: \$20,539

Total: \$2,916,237

Subgrantees of NLS:

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts*

General Support Statewide: \$48,516

General Support Local (subgrant): \$217,747

Technology Grants & Equipment: \$1,694

Total: \$267,958

Merrimack Valley Legal Services

Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project: \$389,336

Fellowship: \$44,815

Total: \$434,151

People



Grants FY08

SOUTHEAST REGION

South Coastal Counties Legal Services

General Support: \$3,317,972
Disability Benefits Project: \$178,392
Medicare Advocacy Project: \$71,674
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project: \$437,191
Technology Grants & Equipment: \$1,517
Fellowships: \$49,666
Total: \$4,056,411

STATEWIDE PROGRAMS

Center for Law and Education

General Support: \$231,040
Technology Grants & Equipment: \$4,073
Total: \$235,113

Center for Public Representation

General Support: \$392,764
Disability Benefits Project: \$51,212
Technology Grants & Equipment: \$4,700
Total: \$448,676

Disability Law Center

General Support: \$462,072
Disability Benefits Project: \$186,191
Litigation Support: \$50,000
Total: \$698,263

Massachusetts Advocates for Children

Children's Law Support Project: \$182,520
Technology Grants & Equipment: \$2,830
Total: \$185,350

Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services (d/b/a Prisoners' Legal Services)

General Support: \$300,349
Technology Grants and Equipment: \$13,182
Total: \$313,531

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

General Support: \$2,772,453
Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project: \$85,960
Website: \$325,616
Farm Workers: \$20,000
Technology Grants & Equipment: \$92,624
Fellowship: \$3,758
Total: \$3,300,411

National Consumer Law Center

General Support: \$231,040
Technology Grants & Equipment: \$3,658
Total: \$234,698

**Children's Law Center of Massachusetts receives both statewide and local funding.*



Antonia Figueroa WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS LEGAL SERVICES

Springfield resident and single mother Antonia Figueroa was understandably "overwhelmed, stressed and worried" when she received a letter from the Department for Transitional Assistance (DTA) that said she must return \$9,310 in past overpaid benefits. Antonia had received welfare intermittently in the past as she struggled to support her family. However, she had been working at a daycare center for two years, first as a receptionist and then as a family services coordinator, and had

Susan Jones

LEGAL ASSISTANCE CORPORATION OF CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

Susan Jones loved her job. As the activities coordinator for a rehabilitation and nursing facility in Worcester, she developed a strong bond with the residents, was well-liked by her coworkers and always received excellent performance evaluations.

But after two years of bringing excitement to her residents' daily lives, Susan was fired for missing work to meet her enlisted daughter at the airport. Her daughter was finally returning home safely after a six-month tour of duty in

Iraq and Kuwait with Air Force Security

Forces. When she learned the exact date of her daughter's arrival at the base in Arizona, Susan applied for time off to welcome her back, which her supervisor and administrator both approved. Days before she was scheduled to leave, however, Susan's supervisor told her that he was cancelling her time off because he was unable to find coverage for her absence. He told a dumbfounded Susan that if she left to see her daughter, he would fire her. Distraught and confused, Susan chose to greet her daughter in Arizona, thereby losing her job.

"That job meant the world to me, and my patients even more than that. But how do you abandon your own daughter?"

Susan began searching for a job, and she applied for unemployment benefits. The Division of Unemployment Assistance ruled that she did not have a compelling reason for leaving her previous job and denied her application. Susan turned to the Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts (LACCM). A LACCM advocate, understanding that the law allowed for unemployment benefits in situations like Susan's, represented her at an appeal. The judge ruled in Susan's favor and awarded her benefits, which allowed her to continue her job search. Susan currently works full-time and is taking college classes.



Success Stories

not been receiving any public benefits. In the letter, the DTA admitted that the overpayment was due to its own miscalculation 10 years prior. Antonia frantically estimated how much in benefits she had received over the years and realized it was impossible for her to owe such a large sum of money.

A co-worker suggested that she contact Western Massachusetts Legal Services (WMLS). After obtaining Antonia's eligibility and payment history, a

WMLS attorney discovered that the DTA had grossly miscalculated her overpayment. In fact, the DTA had included five years when she received no benefits.

Antonia's legal aid attorney negotiated with the DTA, which took full responsibility for this decade-old error. Eventually, the DTA agreed to waive the entire \$9,310, much to Antonia's relief. She is currently very busy working at the daycare center, raising her children and taking college classes.



Ma Family

GREATER BOSTON LEGAL SERVICES

The Ma family arrived in the United States from a small village in China two years ago after waiting more than a decade to enter the country lawfully. Upon settling in Boston, mother Man Yi Ma and father Chao Xiong Ma both found jobs, and their two children, Daisy and Sam, started school. During this time, they dutifully paid the rent for their East Boston apartment, and

they began to save money to send Daisy and Sam to college.

Then one day last January, as Man Yi Ma sat down for lunch, movers and a constable arrived at their door. Bewildered and frightened,

she attempted to communicate to the movers that they were good tenants. None of the movers spoke Chinese, and soon Ma found herself on the street surrounded by the family's belongings.

At the time, the Mas were unaware that their landlord, who lived below them in the same building, had been foreclosed on by the bank months prior. Despite the foreclosure, he had continued to accept the Mas' rent. He also kept them in the dark by screening their mail for eviction notices from the bank.

The bank soon began eviction proceedings against the Mas. The court encouraged them to contact Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), and an attorney there negotiated with the bank on their behalf. The attorney discovered that the paperwork used by the bank's lawyers to evict the Mas had expired. With legal representation, the eviction was stopped, the Mas obtained priority status for stable, affordable housing, and the bank agreed to compensate them for their expenses. They are allowed to remain in their Boston apartment until they can secure new housing.

“Without [legal services], we would have been left in the streets.”

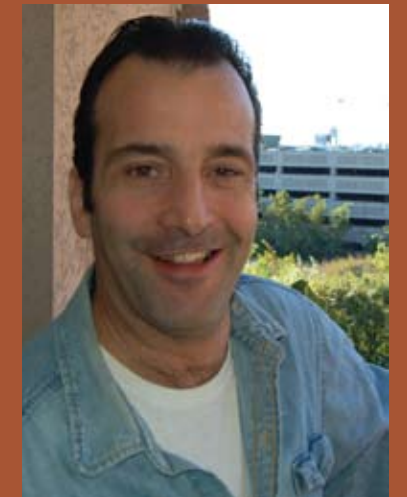
John Hancock

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES AND COUNSELING CENTER

Working for extended periods of time has always been difficult for Chelsea resident John Hancock. He was hit by a car as a child, and the terrible accident left him with a traumatic brain injury and limited coordination. Now 42 years old, John has received Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits most of his life. Ten years ago, he got a job he liked at the airport transporting people with disabilities. He notified the Social Security Administration (SSA) of his successful employment, and they told him that his case would be reevaluated in nine months.

Over the next few years, John received several letters from the SSA notifying him that his benefits were being increased because of his work activity. Then, six years after he started working, John received another letter from SSA. It said that he had been earning too much money to receive benefits, and that he should have stopped receiving checks years earlier. SSA claimed they had overpaid John \$41,000, and they wanted him to pay that impossible sum back.

After months of frustrating appeals to SSA, John visited Community Legal Services and Counseling Center. An attorney there presented John's case to a judge, who waived the \$41,000 overpayment. Freed from such a massive burden, John was able to continue to provide for himself. He is still working at the airport and loves his job.



“I love my job... I like helping people.”

Lou and Janice Gray

NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES

Lou and Janice Gray lived in an apartment with their three children in Lowell, but they had always wanted to move their family into a home. However, Lou suffered from dizzy spells and seizures, which made it difficult for him to work. The Grays were elated, then, when Lou's mother offered them a sizable loan for a down payment on a house.

that they would lose their \$50,000 deposit if they did not sign, but he assured them that they could refinance in six months. Feeling like they had little choice, they signed the loan.

The Grays eventually fell behind on their payments. After six months, they tried refinancing, but were denied. Lou tried to return to work driving trucks, but he suffered a seizure on the job and had to leave again. When their rate skyrocketed to 14 percent, the Grays fell even further behind, and the mortgage company began foreclosure proceedings.

Fortunately, the Grays were referred to Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS). An NLS attorney discovered that the mortgage broker had inflated their income by four times in order to qualify them for a higher home loan. In the end, the attorney uncovered 15 consumer rights violations.

After negotiating with the NLS attorney, the mortgage company agreed to forgive half of the Grays' late payment fees and give them a 7 percent fixed rate on their mortgage. The Grays are now able to afford their mortgage and are no longer in danger of losing their home.



“The help we got from [our legal aid attorney] was the best Christmas present we could have hoped for.”

After they found a house, their real estate agent referred them to a mortgage broker, and they put down a \$50,000 deposit on a fixed-rate 9 percent mortgage.

At the signing, they were told that the loan would in fact have an adjustable 11 percent interest rate. Lou was upset and, recognizing that something was wrong, did not want to sign. But by this time they had moved out of their apartment and into a hotel to make room for new tenants. The broker also warned them

Financials

Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

for the year ending June 30, 2008



Former MLAC board member Ethel "Peggy" Santos receiving her lifetime achievement award.



Rep. Peter J. Koutoujian (D-Waltham); Robert B. Foster; Former Boston Bar Association President Anthony M. Doniger; Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall of the Supreme Judicial Court; Lonnie A. Powers; Rep. Charles A. Murphy (D-Burlington); Former Massachusetts Bar Association President David W. White

	Appropriated Projects			General Support	Technical Assistance	IOLTA Administrative Services	MLAC Administrative	Fixed Asset Fund	Total All Funds
	Disability Benefits Project	Medicare Advocacy Project	Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project						
Revenue									
Commonwealth of Massachusetts	1,204,604	544,286	2,490,993	5,430,541					9,670,424
Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA)				17,018,993					17,018,993
Management fees						58,561			58,561
Net assets released from restrictions					2,700				2,700
Interest and other income	29,961	13,679	56,218	391,089	150		39,878		530,975
TOTAL REVENUE	1,234,565	557,965	2,547,211	22,840,623	2,850	58,561	39,878	0	27,281,653
Expenses									
Grants and contracts awarded	1,204,604	550,906	2,521,289	23,489,521	286,078				28,052,398
Loan forgiveness				136,177					136,177
Salaries					456,063	15,776	671,928		1,143,767
Occupancy					25,312	39,040	90,102		154,454
Professional services					564,813		297,462		862,275
Payroll taxes and fringe benefits					113,399	3,745	147,985		265,129
Other support services					95,861		76,779		172,640
Fellowships					270,106		0		270,106
Depreciation								573,094	573,094
Travel					20,612		48,416		69,028
Office					85,650		20,913		106,563
Total expenses before allocation of administrative expense	1,204,604	550,906	2,521,289	23,625,698	1,917,894	58,561	1,353,585	573,094	31,805,631
Allocation of administrative expense	61,198	27,652	126,550	1,138,185			-1,353,585		0
TOTAL EXPENSES	1,265,802	578,558	2,647,839	24,763,883	1,917,894	58,561	0	573,094	31,805,631
Excess (deficiency) of revenue	-31,237	-20,593	-100,628	-1,923,260	-1,915,044	0	39,878	-573,094	-4,523,978
NET ASSETS, June 30, 2007									
Transfer to other funds	31,237	20,593	100,628	-2,099,403	1,915,044	0	-39,878		9,236,184
NET ASSETS, June 30, 2008	0	0	0	4,165,637	0	0	0	546,569	4,712,206

Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

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