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**Conference Committee Supports Civil Legal Aid, Recommends \$9.5 Million**

*Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation Grateful for Continued Support from Legislature*

BOSTON, June 19 – Yesterday, the conference committee of the House and Senate recommended \$9.5 million for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), the largest funding source for civil legal aid in the Commonwealth, in its FY10 budget (line item 0321-1600). The full House and Senate are expected to adopt the budget recommendation later today.

“On behalf of the Massachusetts legal aid community, I would like to thank the legislative leadership and conference committee members who, through their recommendation, have shown they understand the importance of civil legal aid in keeping communities and families stable during difficult economic times,” said Lonnie Powers, MLAC’s executive director. “We recognize that they had incredibly difficult decisions to make, as this is an exceptionally challenging year for the Commonwealth.”

“We also are very grateful to the many legislators who contacted the conferees on MLAC’s behalf,” added Powers.

The House had previously recommended level funding, \$11 million, for MLAC in its FY10 budget, while the Senate had recommended \$8 million. The Governor now has 10 days to consider the budget.

“We urge the Governor to affirm his long-standing commitment to civil legal aid and maintain funding for MLAC at \$9.5 million in the budget,” said Powers.

MLAC has already reduced its general support grants to the 17 legal aid programs it funds by 46 percent this fiscal year, from \$22 million in FY08 to \$12 million in FY09 (which ends June 30). It also has exhausted all of its reserves to prevent deeper cuts.

MLAC’s sole sources of revenue are the line item and two-thirds of the income from the Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program. IOLTA revenue is projected to plummet 63 percent in FY09, due to reduced interest rates at banks and the drop in real estate transactions.

The vulnerability of MLAC’s funding sources has intensified as the economic crisis has created a sharp increase in demand for legal services; calls to some local legal aid programs are up by approximately 30 percent as residents lose their jobs, homes and benefits. At the same time, legal aid programs, which dedicate the vast majority of their budgets to providing direct client service, have had to lay off attorneys and paralegals, institute furloughs and leave positions unfilled.

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**ABOUT MLAC**

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation 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. It is the largest funding source for civil legal aid programs in Massachusetts. [www.mlac.org](http://www.mlac.org).

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