

## Firms urge governor to maintain funding for MLAC

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A copy of the following letter to Gov. Deval L. Patrick was sent to Lawyers Weekly.

To Governor Patrick:

As managing partners of some of the Boston area's leading law firms, we write regarding the unprecedented crisis threatening civil legal aid to the poor. As you know, the dramatic decline in Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts revenue had forced the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation to reduce its general support grants to local legal aid programs by nearly 40 percent. As a result, legal aid programs will receive \$8.5 million less from MLAC this fiscal year as compared to last year. It is therefore critical that the state appropriation for legal aid be maintained at its current level in fiscal year 2010 despite the difficult economic circumstances facing the commonwealth.

Law firms as well as individual attorneys contribute significant time and money on behalf of civil legal aid. In fiscal year 2008, law firm and individual donations to MLAC-funded programs amounted to \$4.1 million. In addition, 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 \$5.5 million. Without legal aid to attorneys who provide the subject matter expertise and connection to clients, private attorneys could not effectively participate in pro bono work. The state's support of legal aid is the foundation that leverages this important pro bono contribution.

Without legal assistance, low-income litigants do not have meaningful access to the courts. As attorneys we see these situations unfolding every day, with the predictable outcome of lives unnecessarily disrupted and sometimes ruined. Lack of access to courts erodes confidence in the fairness of our commonwealth. At the same time, pro se litigants slow the system for all users, creating inefficiencies and added expenses for everyone.

It is essential that the commonwealth make legal advice and representation in serious civil matters available to those who need it notwithstanding their ability to pay. We urge you to protect legal aid from additional cuts this year by maintaining funding for MLAC in your fiscal year 2010 budget (line item #0321-1600) at \$11,070,424.

The above was signed by the managing partners of 38 Boston law firms.