



January 23, 2012

His Excellency Deval L. Patrick
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 360
Boston, MA 02113

Re: Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation FY13 Budget Request

Dear Governor Patrick:

Over the past three years, funding for civil legal aid has declined precipitously, devastating the delivery of justice to our Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents. **As deans of the Massachusetts law schools, we urge you to increase the FY13 state appropriation for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC, line item 0321-1600) by \$5 million, to \$14,500,000, to avoid irreparable damage to our legal aid programs.**

Income from the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program, which had been the main source of revenue for civil legal aid, declined 78% between FY08 and FY11, and is not expected to improve through 2013. This unprecedented decline, combined with a \$1.5 million cut in the state appropriation for FY10 and two years of level funding from the Commonwealth, left the local civil legal aid programs reeling. Since 2008, the programs have lost 31% of their staff attorneys. If, as anticipated, IOLTA income to MLAC falls by another \$1.7 million during FY12, programs will be forced to lay off an additional 17 to 20 advocates. At the same time, requests for assistance continue to rise as the number of Massachusetts residents eligible for services increased by 11% from 2009 to 2010.

Our law schools teach that the foundation of our democracy is the promise of equal protection under the law. Legal representation is critical to the enforcement of rights and the perception of fairness and legitimacy of the legal system – which in turn is essential to the economy and stability of our Commonwealth. Each year, our students contribute thousands of hours of pro bono legal assistance to low-income people. But students and other volunteer attorneys can meet only a small portion of the identified need. We cannot achieve equal justice without adequate state funding for legal aid programs that assist the elderly, people with disabilities and residents living below 125% of the federal poverty level.

The delivery of civil legal aid in Massachusetts has long been recognized as among the best in the country, but today the system faces unprecedented challenges due to the dramatic IOLTA funding reductions. Increased funding for these critical civil legal aid programs is needed to maintain access to justice for all citizens of the Commonwealth. We respectfully request that your FY13 budget includes increased funding for MLAC.

Thank you for your consideration.

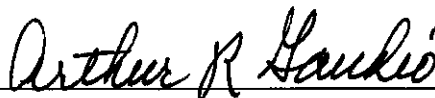
Very truly yours,

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Very truly yours,




Emily A. Spieler
Northeastern University School of Law



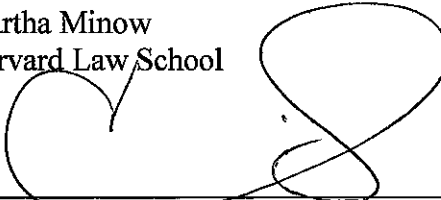
Arthur R. Gaudio
Western New England University School of Law



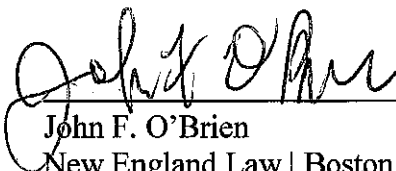
Michael G. Hillinger
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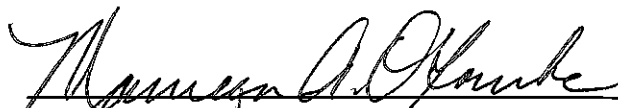
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