

MASSACHUSETTS CORRECTIONAL LEGAL SERVICES

8 WINTER STREET, BOSTON, MA 02108-4705

617-482-2773; WATS 800-882-1413

FAX 617-451-6383

State Prisoner Direct Line 877-249-1342

County Collect Calls 617-482-4124

www.mcls.net

MASSACHUSETTS CORRECTIONAL LEGAL SERVICES **AGENCY PROFILE**

Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services (MCLS)
8 Winter Street
Boston, MA 02108

Mission:

MCLS provides civil legal advocacy for Massachusetts's prisoners, focusing its work in the areas of health and mental health care, guard brutality and conditions of confinement including the segregation and isolation of prisoners.

Projected Budget FY 06:

Total: \$1,079, 105

MLAC: \$153,280

Staffing:

Total: 14

Attorneys: 9

Paralegals: 3

Support staff: 1.8

Leveraging:

MCLS is the sole provider of civil legal service to prisoners. MCLS works collaboratively with sister agencies like the American Civil Liberties Union, Health Law Advocates, the Committee for Public Counsel Services (the public defenders office) and others to advocate for indigent incarcerated citizens in the legislature and in the development of statewide policies.

Board and Staff Diversity:

MCLS' 17 member Board of Directors is comprised of civil rights and criminal defense attorneys, law school and sociology professors, community activists and prisoners, 5 of whom are people of color. MCLS staff includes two people of color, a contract bilingual/bicultural interpreter and four Spanish speakers.

Priority Setting Process and Priorities:

MCLS is currently (2005) undergoing a long range planning process that will include priority setting. A joint board/staff committee has been formed and questionnaires have

been distributed to prisoners and other key stakeholders. MCLS's last priority setting process was in 2001 at which time the above priorities were established. A similar process was employed.

All MCLS staff are responsible for intake, brief service and litigation assignments.

Statewide Activities:

MCLS advocates for prisoners in all of the state prisons as well as the county jails and houses of correction. MCLS advocacy staff also conducts prison visits as part of the Liaison Project, which serves an outreach function and creates a legal presence in the prisons.

Legislative Advocacy:

MCLS testifies before the legislature on a wide variety of measures affecting prisoners including sentencing legislation, parole issues, health and mental health care and civil rights issues. MCLS staff also drafts and reviews proposed legislation and assists with constituent concerns.

Statewide Administrative Advocacy:

MCLS advocates with the state Department of Correction and the Departments of Mental and Public Health on a wide variety of issues affecting prisoners and their re-entry including the public health hazards of untreated, uneducated prisoners with contagious diseases and their release into society.

Impact Projects:

MCLS runs a Rapid Response to Brutality Project where, based on a human rights watch model, advocates respond to reports of abuse at high security prisons and document injuries by photographing them and advocating for the prisoner's treatment. MCLS also has a Prison Brutality Project, which investigates and litigates brutality cases arising in any prison. One half of the 17 cases on MCLS' docket are class action or multiple plaintiff matters including the over-labeling of Latino prisoners as gang members, the unlawful charging prisoners a daily fee for their incarceration, etc.

Direct Services to Individual Clients:

MCLS opens approximately 2,600 brief service matters in FY 04. MCLS also represents nearly 10,000 prisoners in class action matters.

Direct Services to Group Clients:

MCLS advises many prison related groups in their efforts to protect and further prisoners' rights including a faith based college education program, prisoners' families, re-entry groups, those opposed to the building of new jails, prisoner run education programs and others.

Services to Special Populations:

MCLS is litigating a class action matter on behalf of mentally ill prisoners who are over-represented in the sensory deprivation segregation units. MCLS has also litigated matters

on behalf of diabetic prisoners and those with disabilities who are denied participation in prison programs.

Examples of individual and systemic cases

Most MCLS advocates have clients who are mentally ill and unable to conform their conduct to the rigid rules of prison life. Staff obtain releases and medical/mental health records and advocate with prison authorities to accommodate the prisoner's disability by placement in an appropriate housing unit, providing treatment and tailoring sanctions when disciplinary violations occur. Similarly, staff has numerous clients with serious, chronic medical issues. MCLS staff review medical records and advocate for appropriate treatment including medication and treatment for Hepatitis C, cancer, diabetes, pain management, etc.

The Bristol County jail was built when President Taft was in office. Despite the jail's wooden roof and the fact that the doors open manually and with great difficulty, the facility does not have a sprinkler system. Men were double bunked in tiny, unsafe cells built for one. MCLS won a preliminary injunction mandating the use of single cells but is being forced to seek permanent injunctive relief.

MCLS has litigated 8 guard brutality cases. Despite very difficult odds, juries have found that prisoners' civil rights were violated, sending a clear message to prison staff that they cannot abuse prisoners with impunity.

June 2005

MCLS STAFF

Leslie Walker – Executive Director
Laura Anderson - Paralegal
Brad Brockman – Staff Attorney
Peter Costanza – Staff Attorney
Lyonel Jean-Pierre – Staff Attorney
Lauren Petit – Rapid Response Director, Staff Attorney
James Pingeon – Litigation Director
Bonnie Tenneriello – Staff Attorney
Al Troisi – Paralegal Director
Karim Wahid – Brutality Response Paralegal
Caitlin White – Secretary
Jeanne Woods - Secretary