

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

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June 30, 2005

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute Agency Profile

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Websites: www.mlri.org

www.masslegalservices.org

www.masslegalhelp.org

Mission: To represent low-income people, elders, and people with disabilities in their struggles for basic human needs, to defend against measures that harm people living in poverty, to advocate for systemic reforms that achieve social and economic justice, and to provide support that will enable others to carry out these objectives.

The major legal areas and client populations MLRI covers are housing, benefits, family, health, immigration, employment, minority rights, elders, persons with criminal records and persons needing interpreter services. MLRI also will work on and answer questions about other legal issues as appropriate. In addition, MLRI provides functional support in training, technology and publications. Attached is a current profile of the MLRI staff.

Budgets:

Operating - \$2,064,074; Training Consortium - \$120,000; Website Project - \$140,000

Total Budget - \$2,324,074. Percentage Funded by MLAC - 70%

MLAC General Support - \$1,411,240

BWLAP & BFLS - \$85,960

Total MLAC funding - \$1,497,200

Leveraging:

MLRI's standing as the broadest statewide advocacy center and its MLAC funding enable it to secure foundation grants and other resources to expand into new legal areas. Recent examples are the CORI Project, the Hospital Interpreter Assessment Project, greatly expanded food stamp advocacy and the development of online training for legal services.

Staffing:

No. of staff - 33

Total - 27.2 FTE

Paralegals 1.8 FTE

Attorneys 16.5 FTE

Management/

Administration 2.5 FTE

Administrative

Assistants 3.8 FTE

Other staff 2.6 FTE

Board and Staff Diversity

Seven of MLRI's twenty Board members (35%) are members of minority groups. Eight of MLRI's thirty-three staff members (24%) are members of minority groups.

Priority-Setting Process and Priorities:

MLRI sets priorities in two ways:

A) Approximately every five years, MLRI reviews overall program priorities to assess the comparative program resources devoted to its areas of coverage and any new needs that might be addressed. The final product is a program plan, usually commenting on current coverages and recommending additional coverages. MLRI last completed this planning in early 2001.

B) The second level of priority-setting is within each area of coverage or specialty. This planning is ongoing, and is done through the MLRI units, client groups, coalitions and other constituencies as appropriate. Included in this priority-setting is how to deal with issues that cross over into other areas of coverage.

Statewide Activities - MLRI provides advice, co-counseling, coalitions and e-mail lists, resource materials, training and other technical assistance in each of its covered legal fields. MLRI also operates the New England Regional Training Consortium and a Massachusetts legal services training program, which focus on skills, organizational development and other administrative and program issues. MLRI provides much substantive law training through its specialists. MLRI staffs the statewide Legal Services Website Project, which hosts two statewide websites and performs other website-related work. MLRI provides publication technical assistance and coordinates with the MLAC Publications Clearinghouse. MLRI also provides technology support to two legal services programs.

Legislative Advocacy - MLRI provides full advocacy in the covered legal fields, mostly at the state level but also to some extent at the federal level. MLRI employs a legislative coordinator, and many of its staff also engage in this advocacy. This work is funded largely through MLRI's private funds.

Administrative Advocacy - MLRI provides full advocacy at state and federal administrative agencies in all legal fields that it covers. MLRI is also active with the state court system on rules and administrative guidance that affect legal services clients.

Impact Projects - MLRI engages in many impact projects, including the Minority Rights Project, established three years ago; the CORI Project, established two years ago; the Hospital Interpreter Assessment Project, established one year ago; and the statewide Food Stamp Advocacy Project.

Direct Services to Individual Clients - MLRI rarely provides individual case services, and then only on specific systemic advocacy projects or populations. Currently, MLRI operates a statewide CORI hotline. MLRI also has assisted individual clients in class action litigation who are in the process of seeking relief ordered by a court or in a settlement agreement. In recent years there have been three instances of this.

Direct Services to Group Clients - MLRI provides direct and organizational representation to two statewide groups. It also represents many group clients, most of them statewide, on impact advocacy.

Services to Special Populations - The special populations to which MLRI pays particular attention are minorities; people with criminal records; immigrants; and those who need interpreter services in the courts and at hospital emergency rooms.

Case Examples -

A) During the past four years, MLRI has brought seven state court lawsuits aimed at challenging or deferring budget cuts in state benefit programs, pending the availability of funding from the Legislature. In six of these MLRI obtained relief deferring the cuts.

B) With Western Mass. Legal Services, MLRI in 2004 filed a state Superior Court action challenging the failure of the state's Criminal History Systems Board to correct erroneous CORI records which were caused by persons who stole the identities of the persons who are seeking the corrections.

C) MLRI, in conjunction with local legal services programs, has initiated litigation in Lowell and Fall River to challenge the demolition of some 400 viable family public housing units in those two cities and the failure of those cities to provide adequate replacement housing for the displaced residents.

Organizational Chart - It is attached.