

## **A Brief History of Legal Services in Massachusetts**

*By Ken Maclver & Allan Rodgers<sup>1</sup>*

### **Introduction**

This brief piece outlines the history of civil legal services in Massachusetts. It includes an examination of the contemporaneous national developments that influenced the course of legal services delivery at the state and local levels. It does not pretend to give detailed program histories, but rather provides summaries of those programs, which are attached as an Appendix.

### **From Legal aid to the War on Poverty**

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the idea that the justice system should treat everyone the same regardless of economic status inspired the creation of legal aid societies in Chicago, New York and, in 1900, the Boston Legal Aid Society (BLAS). By 1920, BLAS under the inspired leadership of Reginald Heber Smith was handling more than 4000 cases a year from the cities and towns in the greater Boston area and acting as a bridge to pro bono attorneys in the rest of the state. Smith, whose book *Justice and the Poor* inspired lawyers then and caused a later generation to honor him by naming a national fellowship program for legal services attorneys after him (fellows were called Reggies<sup>2</sup>), was responsible for involving the organized bar nationally to get involved with representing low income people.

Eventually, every state had legal aid societies. By the end of 1964, there were 247 legal aid offices, 157 of them with paid staff. They were private charities, underfunded and understaffed, unable to serve more than a fraction of the need, rarely litigating cases fully.

More was needed and, inspired by the law reform efforts of the ACLU and the NAACP, the Ford Foundation in the early sixties funded demonstration community action projects that provided a variety of social and legal services to the poor in several cities, including the Boston Legal Assistance Project at Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD).<sup>3</sup> These projects were the building blocks for the 1964 seminal article "The War on Poverty: A Civilian Perspective" by Edgar and Jean Cahn that

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<sup>2</sup> The Reginald Heber Smith fellowship program with its emphasis on recruiting minority law graduates would fund and inspire over 2000 legal services lawyers from 1967 until its end in 1985.

<sup>3</sup> The early sixties were a wakeup call for lawyers in general. The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law was created at the request of President John F. Kennedy in the summer of 1963 because of the absence of the organized bar in the civil rights movement.

advocated staffed neighborhood law offices as a conceptual framework for evening the legal playing field for the poor.

Also in 1964, Lyndon Johnson began an actual “War on Poverty” and in response Congress passed legislation creating the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). At the heart of the War on Poverty was the notion of the delivery of social services and health care directly to the poor by placing all necessary services in the community under the umbrella of a community action program (CAP). Although the OEO Act of 1964 did not cover legal services specifically, OEO director Sargent Shriver, the late President Kennedy’s brother-in-law, included it as a fundable activity at the urging of the Cahns. The Act was soon amended to allow “other types of activities related to the purpose of community action programs such as legal services for the poor...”<sup>4</sup> In 1965, OEO funded 27 legal services projects around the country, including a four office project housed in the New Bedford community action program.<sup>5</sup> The fledgling law firms were called legal services projects as distinct from legal aid programs to signal a new kind of community-based advocacy.<sup>6</sup> From the beginning, the boards of both the legal services programs and the CAPs had a requirement that one-third of the board be community members (client eligible) to ensure community participation and control.<sup>7</sup>

By the fall of 1967, this number had increased to almost 300 projects, including Boston Legal Assistance Project at ABCD, Merrimack Valley Legal Services at Community Teamwork in Lowell, and Neighborhood Legal Services at Lynn Economic Opportunity.<sup>8</sup> Most of these programs were funded through the local community action programs, meaning that their service territories mirrored the service territory of the CAPs. This meant that some legal services programs had to cover multiple courts surrounding a particular city, because the service territory of the CAPs did not take into account the need for coordination in representing clients in court.

On the national level, OEO established a separate office within the Community Action Program (CAP) and a National Advisory Committee with officials of the American Bar Association (ABA), the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA) and other private citizens.<sup>9</sup> This insured the autonomy

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<sup>4</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. §2785(a), as amended (1965). In 1967, it was made a “special emphasis program” See A. Housman & L. Perle, SECURING EQUAL JUSTICE FOR ALL: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CIVIL LEGAL ASSISTANCE (2007) at 7.

<sup>5</sup> Pye, “The Role of Legal Services in the Antipoverty Program,” Law and Contemporary Problems 211, 230-31 (Winter 1966). The Pye article is an excellent source for early legal aid and OEO history.

<sup>6</sup> The term “legal aid” is now in vogue again, a branding study having shown it to be more descriptive in the public’s eye than the more generic “legal services.” COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT AT 16 (NLADA et al) (October 15, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Id. at 225-26 & n.77-79.

<sup>8</sup> See generally Stumpf, “Law and Poverty: A Political Perspective,” 1968 Wis. L. Rev. 694 for the history and facts concerning this period.

<sup>9</sup> Pye, *supra* n.4, at 227-28 & n. 90, 92-94.

necessary to win support from the national bar, who felt strongly that the nonlawyers who ran the CAPs should not direct legal strategy and choices. At the same time, there was often hostility from local attorneys, who perceived the programs as a threat to business. The decision also led to political infighting and confrontations within the local CAP agencies and eventually resulted in the local legal services projects becoming separate corporations with their own boards and offices or, in some instances, having OEO funding go to the existing legal aid societies.<sup>10</sup>

Amongst the turmoil, a sense of the limitless possible was in the air. At a national legal services planning conference at Harvard Law School in 1967, OEO Legal Services Director Earl Johnson, affirming the policy advocated by his predecessor the first OEO Legal Services Director Clint Bamberger, stated that “the primary goal of [legal services] in the near future should be law reform...a legal system in which the poor enjoy the same legal opportunities as the rich.”<sup>11</sup> The opportunity for establishing a capacity for support of local legal services programs and statewide systemic advocacy soon presented itself in Massachusetts.

A group of advocates using the corporate shell of Voluntary Defenders, Inc. a private nonprofit created in 1938 to represent criminal defendants and rendered obsolete by the Supreme Court decisions on right to counsel, applied for and was awarded funding in 1968 for a system of state support by OEO. They named the new program the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) and by the end of the year Allan Rodgers, a lawyer from the Attorney General’s office, became its executive director, a position he has held for more than forty years. OEO also established and funded, with MLRI providing the supervision, a series of housing lawyer positions in community action programs that did not have legal services programs. Those locations included Brockton, Lawrence, Fall River and Framingham. They continued for several years until OEO-funded legal services programs could be established in those areas.

OEO in partnership with major universities funded a series of university-affiliated national centers to research major substantive law areas and offer litigation support and training to the newly created legal services field programs sprouting across the country. Two of these new National Support Centers were founded in Massachusetts. Boston College Law School, led by its Dean Father Robert Drinan, partnered

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<sup>10</sup> The history of this tumultuous time in legal services is beyond the scope of this paper, but serves us well to recall that legal services for the poor has always been controversial. It was born as part of a much larger battle that involved civil rights, civil liberties, the [Vietnam] antiwar movement, and poor people seeking economic equality. See R. Kotz & M.L. Kotz, *A PASSION FOR EQUALITY: GEORGE WILEY AND THE MOVEMENT* (1977) for a flavor of the times in the context of organizing the poor around welfare issues.

The internal battle for control over the handling of specific cases or clients by staff attorneys was resolved by Formal Opinion 324 of the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Ethics and Professional Responsibility (August 9, 1970), which defined the board’s oversight function (“establish and enforce [operational] broad policy”) as distinct from that of individual clients and cases (“board must ... guard against unreasonable interference with the handling of specific cases or ... clients by staff attorneys”).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Stumpf, *supra* n.6, at 711 & n.65.

with OEO to establish the National Consumer Law Center (NCLC). And, across the Charles River in Cambridge, the Center for Law and Education opened its doors as the Harvard Center for Law and Education, established by OEO and Harvard's schools of law and education, with a mission "to protect and advance the legal interests of the poor through research and action on the legal implications of educational policies particularly those affecting equality of educational opportunity."

A golden age of law reform ensued. Legal services programs, lead by MLRI, were very active in the state. MLRI drafted numerous pieces of legislation that reformed how the law treated low income people. Significant new laws included Chapter 40B (state override of local decisions turning down affordable housing), a number of tenants' rights bills, Chapter 93A private right of action for consumers, state administrative rule-making reforms, special education law, bilingual education law and the lead paint law. Legal services was active at state administrative agencies, persuading the Department of Public Utilities to adopt strong utility customer consumer protections, the Attorney General to promulgate strong regulations under Chapter 93A, and the state to establish a strong Sanitary Code for regulating residential housing. Legal services was also active in the courts, establishing a warranty of habitability in residential rentals, forcing the welfare department to institute "fair hearings" before terminating recipients' benefits, eliminating "self help" evictions by landlords, reforming wage garnishment and attachment, and upholding the newly-enacted DPU customer service regulations. And, CLE was co-counsel in the landmark Boston school desegregation case *Morgan. v Hennigan*. 379 F. Supp. 410 (D. Mass.1974).

Nationally, the legal services arm of OEO administered its programs through a system of regional offices, which moved oversight to a more local level. This became particularly important when President Nixon undertook a largely successful effort to dismantle all of the poverty programs by simply defunding OEO. As one author noted: "Supporters of individual programs, such as the Legal Services Program, became much more concerned with saving them than with the fate of OEO as a whole"<sup>12</sup> Fate, in the form of Watergate and federal court intervention, delayed the President's actions long enough to rescue part of OEO, including legal services. The long battle in Congress had reduced the number of offices by 40% because of funding cuts. In response to intense lobbying and a series of compromises, the President eventually agreed with legal services supporters and the American Bar Association that a new beginning as a separate and independent federal agency was essential for survival of the program.

### **The Legal Services Corporation and the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation**

In 1974, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Legal Services Corporation Act, establishing an independent federal agency with an eleven member board appointed by the President. President Nixon, a lawyer, gave his support to the new agency, which ended its politically charged oversight by OEO (legal services had lacked a national director and leadership for over a year). LSC came with a number of restrictions attached to its enabling legislation banning or restricting activities such as

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<sup>12</sup> Hannon, "From Politics to Reality: An Historical Perspective of the Legal Services Corporation," 25 Emory L.J. 645 (1976).

strikes, boycotts, picketing, and voter registration, and advocacy involving abortions and desegregation of schools.<sup>13</sup>

In Massachusetts, the new corporation funded the following field programs, which constituted the basic delivery system of legal services until the reconfigurations of 1996 and 2005: Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) – Greater Boston; Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS) – Cambridge, Somerville and surrounding towns; Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS) – Lynn and southern Essex County; Merrimack Valley Legal Services (MVLS) – Lawrence and northern Essex and Lowell and northern Middlesex; South Middlesex Legal Services (SMLS) – Framingham and communities in southern Middlesex and Western Norfolk; Southeastern Mass. Legal Assistance Corporation (SMLAC)– Brockton, New Bedford, Fall River and the rest of Bristol County; Legal Services for Cape Cod and Islands (LSCCI) – Barnstable County, the Islands and lower Plymouth County; Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts (LACCM) – Worcester County; Western Mass. Legal Services (WMLS) – Hampton, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties. LSC funded MLRI as the state support center. It also funded NCLC and CLE as National Support Centers, the programs gaining independence from their university partners in the process.

With the election of Jimmy Carter and a Democratic Congress in 1976, LSC funding increased dramatically during the period 1976-80 and expanded throughout the country. Program staffs increased, specialized units became the standard of operation, law reform litigation became institutionalized, and staff training and supervision professionalized. CPR and DLC offered specialized state support litigation and training in the disabilities field.

In the early 1980s, President Ronald Reagan, hostile to legal services since his days as California governor when CRLA represented the farm workers in actions against his financial backers, made many attempts to eliminate the Legal Services Corporation and its funding. These were partially successful when federal funding for LSC was cut by 25%. Many programs laid off staff and field operations were reduced significantly. It would be more than a decade before programs returned to 1980 staffing levels and then only briefly during the first term of President Clinton.

In response to these threats, LSC established regional training centers and regional computer assisted legal research projects across the country, decentralizing its operations. MLRI was the coordinator for these programs for the entire Northeast. The Northeast Regional Training Center at MLRI joined with four similar programs in other sections of the country to develop and deliver a professional training curriculum for legal services staff.<sup>14</sup> When LSC attempted to defund the training centers, the

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<sup>13</sup> Id. 648-650. These restrictions were lobbied for successfully by powerful interests such as the California grape growers (boycotts and strikes) and a bloc of southern states (voter registration, desegregation).

<sup>14</sup> The other centers were the Southeast Training Center (Little Rock, Ark); Midwest Training Center (Indianapolis); Western Regional Training Center (Colorado L.S.); National Substantive Law Center at Western Center on Law and Poverty (Los Angeles); and National Management Training & Leadership at NLADA (Washington, D.C.). The group was known as the National Training Coordinating Council (NTCC) and met quarterly to plan and coordinate a national training agenda.

Washington firm Covington & Burling acting as pro bono counsel to the centers secured an injunction against LSC and later settled the case in favor of refunding. Congressman Barney Frank of Massachusetts attached a rider to the LSC Act continuing funding for the training centers when LSC failed to include them in its annual budget request to Congress. Paradoxically, the decentralization of training in the hostile national climate resulted in strong and coordinated staff training and organizational development across the country, something that continued until the centers were eliminated by Congress in the 1996 cutbacks.

In the face of the federal cutbacks, programs looked for new sources of funding and found powerful new allies in local bar associations and a national ABA-led effort. In 1983, the state legislature created the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), which is now the largest funder of civil legal aid programs in Massachusetts. MLAC was created in part as a response to the unrelenting attacks at the federal level on civil legal services for the poor to protect the rights of low-income people in Massachusetts. It was funded initially by a surcharge on court filing fees. The statute required that funds from MLAC be distributed at least 80% to local programs based on the poverty population, and up to 20% for statewide programs and state support. Eventually, MLAC used the maximum 20% of funding allowed by the statute to fund seven more state support programs, in addition to MLRI: Disability Law Center (DLC), the Center for Public Representation (CPR), NCLC, CLE, Massachusetts Advocacy Center (MAC), the Children's Law Center of Massachusetts (CLCM), and Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services (MCLS).

Almost a decade later, the Legislature eliminated the dedicated court filing fee surcharges from MLAC's budget, directing them instead to the General Fund. MLAC and its programs lobbied successfully for a general support appropriation from the Legislature, and later for additional "special project" funding: the Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project (BWLAP) for representation of domestic violence victims, the Disability Benefits Project (DBP) for representation of applicants for disability benefits and the Medicare Advocacy Project (MAP) for Medicare recipients.

Another major source of legal services funding was the creative application of mandated bank payments of interest on aggregated lawyer client trust accounts (the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts or IOLTA program). Florida became the first state to adopt an IOLTA program as a funding source for legal services. Massachusetts was not far behind.<sup>15</sup> MLAC now receives two-thirds of all IOLTA funding. The

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<sup>15</sup> The Supreme Judicial Court established an IOLTA Committee to oversee the IOLTA program and, in particular, to work with lawyers and the banks to improve participation and to reduce the costs of the IOLTA accounts. For example, the IOLTA Committee persuaded some banks to establish overnight accounts, with interest paid, for certain large IOLTA accounts. More recently, the IOLTA Committee persuaded the SJC to issue a rule that lawyers cannot invest funds in IOLTA accounts where the banks do not pay interest to IOLTA accounts at rates as least as high as those they pay to comparable accounts. The Committee established a "Safe Harbor" rate pegged to the federal funds rate established by the Federal Reserve Bank, giving banks the option of choosing the Safe Harbor rate as an alternative to demonstrating rate comparability.

Massachusetts Bar Foundation (27%) and the Boston Bar Foundation (7%) share the rest, much of it awarded to legal services programs under an annual competitive process.<sup>16</sup>

Massachusetts has succeeded more than most states in reducing or eliminating bank fees on IOLTA accounts and getting reasonable cooperation from banks. These efforts coupled with the housing market boom resulted in significant increases in IOLTA funds, and thereby more adequate funding for those legal services programs that received MLAC general support funds. However, with the crash of an overheated housing market and a sharp decline in the federal funds rate in 2008, IOLTA funds plummeted and legal services programs with MLAC general support funding have been forced to lay off staff, reduce services, and threaten program diversity.

Whereas, IOLTA is driven in large measure by housing sales and refinancing, LSC funding is driven by national politics. Its supporters and detractors are legion, with the very survival of the program often at stake. For every significant increase in program funding and operational support (1965-70; 1976-80; 1992-1996; 2008-), it seems there is a corresponding decrease (1971-74; 1981-88; 1996-2000). After many years of stable but level funding during the Bush administration, the Obama administration and Congress supported modest but much needed increases in 2009 and 2010, helping to stabilize those programs that receive LSC funds.

### **Reconfiguring the Delivery System**

In 1996, a Newt Gingrich-led Congress reduced federal funding for legal services and imposed severe restrictions on those programs receiving LSC funds. These restrictions also applied to other money received by an LSC grantee. Congress also eliminated federal funding for national support centers, state support centers, regional training programs and regional CALR programs. Another round of cutbacks ensued, although not as severe as the early 1980s because of a steady rise in IOLTA and legislative funding.

As a result, the Massachusetts programs and MLAC engaged in extensive planning about what to do in response to the restrictions. This led to two reconfigurations of the delivery system; one voluntary in 1996, the other mandated by LSC (joined by MLAC) in 2002. In 1996, SMLAC, NLS, WMLS, LACM and GBLS gave up LSC funding and LSC funded two new "hot line" and intake programs, Massachusetts Justice Project (MJP) and New Center for Legal Advocacy (NCLA), serving respectively the central-west and southeast sections of the state. Also, VLP became an LSC grantee and funded the Legal Advocacy and Resource Center (LARC) with a subgrant for a "hot line" and intake program serving the east region.

Eventually, there were reorganizations of some programs so that in each region there was at least one program that did not receive LSC funds and was therefore free of the restrictions receipt of those funds imposed on all program funding. These changes enabled legal services to continue legislative advocacy, administrative advocacy, class action litigation and to recover statutory attorneys fees in certain cases.

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<sup>16</sup> Today, LSC funds four legal services programs, as many local programs gave up their LSC funding or were defunded by LSC (statewide and national centers) to become MLAC funded. MLAC now funds 17 programs, including subgrants. Also, the Massachusetts and Boston Bar Foundations offer some financial support to about 100 programs and projects across the state.

With the elimination of the Regional Training Centers in 1996, there was a substantial gap in the provision of training to Legal Services staff members in Massachusetts, which could not be made up by MLRI and the other statewide programs alone. To fill that gap, the New England legal services programs founded the New England Legal Services Training Consortium in 2002. Through annual assessments paid by participating programs, the Training Unit at MLRI was increased and developed comprehensive skills training packages and events for New England legal services programs. Nationally, legal services staff training had fallen into disarray with the exception of the Midwest, which retained a regional training capacity. On January 1, 2006, MLRI and the training personnel decided to establish a new, independent nonprofit organization: the Center for Legal Aid Education. CLAE's mandate was to continue providing training for New England programs while expanding its efforts to other parts of the country by creative use of technology and fundraising from targeted areas.

In 2002, the Legal Services Corporation required Massachusetts to examine its delivery system and make recommendations on the most effective number of LSC-funded programs for service delivery. MLAC joined the planning process and the entire state began looking at reconfiguring its delivery system. As a result, a Massachusetts State Planning Board for Civil Legal Services was established lead by former Chief Justice Herbert Wilkins and a number of distinguished members of the bar and other organizations. During this period, MLAC commissioned a study by an experienced legal services consultant of its eight state support centers. The ensuing report sparked the programs to perform a statewide priority-setting process, recommend better coordination among statewide programs, devote more attention to the services provided by each of the programs and generally increase their usefulness to the field programs in the state.

Together with the project directors, the State Planning Board reviewed program configurations in order to decide on a new configuration.<sup>17</sup> In 2004, the board recommended, and LSC and MLAC accepted the designation of four regional programs to be funded by LSC in partnership with parallel MLAC-funded programs to insure full service operations statewide: Volunteer Lawyers Project for the East region together with GBLS, SMLS (later Metro West Legal Services [MWLS]), and CLSACC; Merrimack Valley-North Shore Legal Services (MVNS) , renamed to better describe its Northeast region together with NLS

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<sup>17</sup> In 2005, with Wilkins continuing as chair, the Planning Board became the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission, under an order of the Supreme Judicial Court (SJC), created to review and make recommendations on the delivery of legal services to the poor, and to examine other access to justice issues in Massachusetts. An original commission member, Judge Dina Fein, has assumed a newly created post of Special Advisor to the court system on issues of access. The Commission's work has also resulted in an Access to Justice fee of a \$50 dues add-on. In February 2010, following its initial five year term, the SJC reconstituted the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission and appointed twenty-three members, with Justice Ralph Gants and Attorney David Rosenberg as its co-chairs

and CLCM; the New Center for Legal Advocacy (NCLA) for the Southeast region together with South Coastal Counties Legal Services (SCCLS) (a merger of LSCCI and SMLAC); and Massachusetts Justice Project (MJP), to cover Worcester County with LAACM and the four Westernmost counties with WMLS. As part of the process and in agreement with the programs, MLAC decided not to award general support funding to the LSC-funded programs because of the federal restrictions that would be imposed on its funds. MLAC also formalized the regional delivery systems with the flexibility for each region to choose the most effective delivery for its area and mandated a decision making process for each region. This regional system remains in effect today.

There are many support services in Massachusetts for the regional systems that help advocacy and strengthen programs. Each of the statewide support centers offers advice, co-counseling, and training in its specialty areas. MLRI coordinates and manages the statewide websites and a number of statewide coalitions which offer information sharing, advice, advocacy strategy, and networking in housing, family law, benefits, employment, elder law, advocacy coordination, and the like. The Attorneys of Color group has played an important role by advocating for systemic diversity. The Race Equity Coalition is examining creative ways to do impact work in the many ethnic communities in Massachusetts.

MLAC has sponsored a number of staffed “initiatives” of general benefit to the system: a diversity coalition, which raises awareness of diversity issues and provides technical assistance on diversity to legal aid programs across the Commonwealth; an Equal Justice Coalition, which includes representatives from bar associations across the state, law firms and legal services programs, who together work to protect the state appropriation for civil legal aid; and a central technology project, which supports the technology infrastructure of the state and includes case management, VOIP, computer security, and, in some regions, centralized intake.

During the past 45 years, the legal services delivery system has been characterized by its cutting edge advocacy, its dedication to clients, its growth into a mature and stable institution, and, perhaps most of all, its resiliency. Today, unlike 1965, thanks to legal services citizens in Massachusetts have a right to a fair hearing before losing their benefits, cannot be evicted without their day in court, can sue unscrupulous banks and merchants who charge them excessive interest or sell them shoddy goods and otherwise engage in fraudulent practices, enter any district or probate court in the state and ask for protection from an abuser, and require a school to justify its educational plan for their child, to name just a few of the rights that did not exist in 1965. It’s a fine legacy.

## Appendix

### **Histories in Brief of Massachusetts Legal Services Programs**

#### **Field Programs**

**Northeast Region (CLCM, MVNS, NLS)**

**Eastern Region (CLSCC, GBLS, LARC, MWLS, VLP)**

**Southeast Region (NCLA, SCCLS)**

**Central-West Region (LAACM, MJP, WMLS)**

#### **Support Centers**

**CLE, CLCM, CPR, DLC, MLRI, MAC, NCLC, PLS**

**Center for Law and Education:** CLE has been a national advocacy organization since 1969, and represents indigent students and parents in efforts to improve public education. As a support center for Massachusetts programs, CLE assists advocates representing students who are expelled, discriminated against, denied quality programs and meaningful opportunities to learn. CLE helps advocates and their clients implement key education programs (e.g., Title I, special education) and reform initiatives through internal school capacity-building and outside advocacy, including litigation. CLE has developed expertise in connecting the legal rights and responsibilities of students and school personnel to actual school practice, and has consistently helped shape governing legislation and policies.

**Center for Public Representation.** CPR has been assisting people with disabilities, both in the community and in institutional settings, for over thirty years. CPR has offices in Northampton and Newton, although much of the Center's activities occur throughout Massachusetts and in other jurisdictions. Through its systemic advocacy over the past three decades, the Center has been a major force in promoting improvements in services for citizens with mental disabilities throughout the country. With funding from MLAC since 1986, the Center serves as a statewide backup center and provides statewide technical assistance and support to public and private attorneys who represent people with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

**Children's Law Center of Massachusetts:** Founded in 1977 and funded by MLAC since 1986, CLCM is a legal resource and advocacy center for low-income children of the Commonwealth. It offers legal assistance in the areas of regular and special education, child welfare, state interagency disputes and juvenile justice matters. In addition to individual representation, the Law Center provides technical assistance and trainings to parents, attorneys and helping professionals; maintains a statewide information and referral network; and engages in various policy endeavors that include state task force work, and legislative and appellate advocacy on matters impacting children and families. Its staff of thirteen operates out of a main office in Lynn and satellite office in Roxbury and Lawrence. CLCM partners with MVNS and NLS to deliver services for the northeast region.

**Community Legal Services And Counseling Center:** Since its founding in 1970 as the Cambridgeport Problem Center, CLSACC has provided free civil legal assistance and affordable mental health services to low-income residents of the Cambridge-Boston area. CLSACC's legal program provides a broad range of legal assistance, including individual legal services, participation in court reform efforts, community legal education, participation in task forces and coalitions, and the development and distribution of self-help legal rights materials to help low-income people better access the legal system. The premise of CLSACC's service model is that volunteers play an integral role in carrying out the agency's mission.

**Disability Law Center:** DLC is a statewide backup center specializing in disability law. DLC is also the Protection and Advocacy agency for Massachusetts, responsible for providing protection and advocacy for the rights of Massachusetts residents with disabilities. DLC receives federal, state and private funding. Its mission is to provide legal advocacy on disability issues that promote the fundamental rights of all people with disabilities to participate fully and equally in the social and economic life of Massachusetts.

**Greater Boston Legal Services:** Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) is the result of the merger of three legal services organizations, each with its own proud history of serving poor people: the Boston Legal Aid Society (BLAS), the Boston Legal Assistance Project (BLAP), and Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS). BLAP and BLAS merged and became GBLS in 1976. GBLS began receiving MLAC funding in 1983, when MLAC was created. In 1996 GBLS merged with Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services and gave up its LSC funding in order to continue to provide a full range of legal options to its clients. In partnership with LARC, VLP, CLSACC, and MWLS, GBLS is the largest provider of free, civil legal assistance to low-income individuals, families and organizations in the eastern region.

**Legal Advocacy & Resource Center:** LARC was created in response to a 1977 study of the delivery of legal services in Massachusetts which recommended the establishment of a "legal services hotline." Since 1983, LARC has operated such a hotline in support of its mission to "assist needy individuals who perceive they have a legal problem by providing quality legal information and advocacy, and by making referrals to legal and social service agencies."

In addition to providing legal advice and referral to many thousands of callers throughout Massachusetts on a wide range of civil legal matters, including housing, domestic relations, employment, consumer and public benefits issues, LARC provides intake services for GBLS and VLP under a subgrant of LSC funds from VLP.

**Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts:** LACCM grew out of a 1982 merger between the federally-funded Central Massachusetts Legal Services and the privately-funded Legal Aid Society of Worcester. LACCM advocates provide a full range of legal services in the areas of housing and homelessness, family law primarily for domestic violence victims, government benefits, humanitarian-based immigration relief, employment law, and elder issues, in order to assist low-income and elderly households achieve the following outcomes: 1) housing stability; 2) financial security; 3) dignity & safety; 4) healthcare access.

**Massachusetts Advocates for Children:** MAC began in 1969 as an outgrowth from the Task Force on Children Out of School. MAC is dedicated to improving the life and educational opportunities for children, particularly those who are vulnerable because of race, poverty, limited English or disability. MAC prioritizes systems change to have the greatest impact, but also helps individuals through case advocacy. MAC advocates in three areas: a) the Children's Law Support Project, which coordinates a statewide legal and legislative agenda on behalf of low income children to address the interrelated needs of children of battered women who have been exposed to domestic violence, homeless children, children with disabilities, and children excluded from school; b) the Statewide Inclusion Project, which ensures that special education laws enable children with disabilities to receive a high quality education, and c) the Boston School Reform Project, which conducts administrative advocacy and community outreach in the African-American and Latino communities for greater equity and excellence in the Boston Public Schools.

**Massachusetts Justice Project:** MJP was created as a screening and brief service program for central and western Massachusetts in response to the federal funding cuts and restrictions placed on legal services in 1996, a role it continues in for the central-west region. The MJP mission is to provide a first response to low income clients seeking to acquire and preserve the basic necessities of life.

**Massachusetts Law Reform Institute:** MLRI has since 1968 been the principal support center for Massachusetts legal services programs and their clients. MLRI's missions to achieve systemic legal improvements for the poor and to provide assistance to others who represent them. Among MLRI's many law reform achievements are: strong consumer protections for gas, electric and telephone customers; major improvements in the usefulness and fairness of federal housing vouchers and forestalling the elimination of viable low-income housing; eliminating unlawful barriers to those trying to leave welfare for viable jobs; and state laws requiring interpreter services in the courts and at acute health care facilities.

**Merrimack Valley-North Shore Legal Services:** MVNS, founded as an LSC program in 1974, was originally an OEO legal services project at Lowell's Community Teamworks. MVNS offers civil legal services to low income people in northern Middlesex County and Essex County, in partnership with CLCM and NLS for the northeast region. MVNS specializes in public and subsidized housing cases in northern Middlesex, domestic violence litigation for the region, elder law (health, nursing homes, guardianship, and the like), bankruptcy law, and also operates a *pro bono* private bar program. MVNS offers a wide range of community outreach and education, particularly through its Cambodian Outreach Project and its Lowell District Court Domestic Violence Project.

**Metro West Legal Services:** MWLS, founded as South Middlesex Legal Services (MWLS) in 1976 is located in Framingham. MWLS in partnership with GBLS, VLP, and CLSCC serves the eastern region. MWLS provides free, civil legal assistance to low-income people in 36 municipalities in South and Central Middlesex and South Norfolk Counties. Priority cases include domestic violence, housing, benefits, education and elder law. To augment the work done by staff, MWLS operates a volunteer attorney program in cooperation with local bar associations.

**National Consumer Law Center:** NCLC is a national legal resource and advocacy organization focusing on the legal needs of low income consumers. For over 40 years the Center has been the consumer law resource center to which Massachusetts legal services and private lawyers, public policy makers, and low-income community organizations have turned for legal answers, policy analysis, and technical and legal support. The Center's expert staff provides a wide range of direct assistance to attorneys representing low income consumers, including consultation on legal issues, co-counseling, expert testimony, legal research, continuing legal education, widely respected treatises, and technical support. Center advocacy has had a profoundly beneficial impact on policies affecting low income families and secured tens of millions of dollars for Massachusetts consumers.

**Neighborhood Legal Services:** NLS is a full service civil legal assistance program serving low income clients in Essex county for more than 40 years. In partnership with CLCM and MVNS in the northeast region, it provides assistance in the general areas of housing (Essex County), public benefits entitlement for the entire region, employment, elder law and health care. It also provides centralized intake services for the region.

NLS's organizational goals are to increase economic opportunity, safety, and family stability and to promote fairness and equity for the area's low income households. NLS staff provide individual service representation, handle major systemic and institutional reform cases, and work with community organizations to effect public policy change and bring economic resources to low income neighborhoods.

**New Center For Legal Advocacy:** NCLA is a full service poverty law firm providing free civil legal services since 1997. Located in New Bedford and Plymouth, NCLA provides high quality legal services for low-income clients in the southeast region. NCLA features a "hotline" system for handling a high volume of counsel and advice cases, centralized intake for SCCLS for direct representation for more complex or LSC-restricted cases, a Private Attorney Involvement program for referral of cases to area attorneys *pro bono*, *pro se* clinic programs (including a law student clinic), and community education and *pro bono* recruitment seminars.

**Prisoners' Legal Services:** PLS is a statewide advocacy organization that represents prisoners in civil cases involving state and county correctional institutions.

**South County Coastal Legal Services:** SCCLS in partnership with NCLA is the principal provider of legal services to low-income people in the southeast region. Its offices are in Fall River, New Bedford, Brockton, and Hyannis. It was founded originally as private, not-for profit corporation, founded in 1965 by OEO as OnBoard Legal Services, Inc. SCCLS focuses its work on the most important needs of its client community: housing, public benefits/public services, domestic relations, education, employment and immigration. It operates three seniors law projects as well.

**Volunteer Lawyers Project :** Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) of the Boston Bar Association (BBA) was established in 1977 as an experimental program funded by LSC and the BBA. to provide legal representation in civil matters to the indigent through the pro bono services of private attorneys. In 1996, VLP become the LSC grantee for Greater Boston when GBLS gave up its federal funding because of the federal restrictions on non-LSC funds. VLP has a subcontract with LARC to operate a hotline to screen and refer clients for GBLS or to advise

and counsel clients when services are not available or necessary. VLP's work is augmented by a modest in-house case handling capacity.

**Western Massachusetts Legal Services:** WMLS resulted from the consolidation of three community legal aid programs, serves the central-midwest region in partnership with LAACM and MJP. It has offices in Springfield, Northampton and Pittsfield. Through its collaborative work with other human service providers and its community legal education efforts, WMLS expands its impact and helps to fulfill the promise of equal justice.