

The Honorable Therese Murray  
Senate President  
State House, Room 332  
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

April 22, 2010

Dear Madam President:

As you may know, funding for civil legal aid has been decimated over the past two years, and the results have been devastating for the delivery of justice to our Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents. **As deans of the Massachusetts law schools, we urge you to maintain the state appropriation for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC, line item 0321-1600) at its current level of \$9.5 million so that the crisis is not exacerbated.**

MLAC's income from the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program has fallen 63% since FY08 and has not recovered in FY10. This decline – combined with the \$1.5 million cut in the state appropriation for FY10 – has left civil legal aid programs reeling. Requests for assistance at some programs are up 25 to 40%, while these same programs have been forced to lay off attorneys and paralegals, reduce salaries, institute furloughs and leave vacant positions unfilled.

Our law schools teach that the foundation of our democracy is the promise of equal protection under the law. 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 prolonged recession. Level funding for these critical programs is needed in FY11 to ensure that tenants are able to keep a roof over their heads following their landlord's foreclosure, victims of domestic violence are able to escape their abusers, and the elderly have the support they need to seek wrongfully denied health care benefits.

We respectfully request that your budget priorities for FY11 include level funding for MLAC.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

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