



STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

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LAWYERS RALLY FOR CIVIL LEGAL AID: To help low-income Massachusetts residents get legal assistance to fight predatory lending practices, child custody disputes, and domestic violence, advocates for legal aid held a rally Thursday calling on lawmakers to increase legal aid funding by \$5 million. Gov. Deval Patrick proposed a \$2.4 million increase in the civil legal aid account in the budget proposal under review by lawmakers, said Steve Oleskey, chairman of the Equal Justice Coalition. When asked why the funds should be approved as the state looks to pare back some spending accounts, Pattye Comfort, director of Equal Justice Coalition, told the News Service close to half of the state's low-income residents seeking civil legal aid are turned away due to lack of resources. According to Comfort, there are 700,000 Massachusetts residents eligible for civil legal aid. The coalition's total budget request for legal aid is \$14.7 million, including \$3 million for legal assistance for battered women. "Legal aid is not a handout to the poor. It's about making the justice system accessible," said Oleskey. Haverhill resident Janice Gray told a standing-room-only crowd of lawyers in Great Hall the legal services she obtained helped her family fight 15 consumer protection violations. The violations were the result of an adjustable rate mortgage, with interest rates that soared to 14 percent, sold to Gray's family. Two months ago, with the help of legal aid, the family negotiated a fixed rate mortgage with a 7 percent interest rate and saved their home from foreclosure, said Gray. "It was the best Christmas present we could have hoped for," said Gray.