

Media Contact:

Brianne Miers

617-391-5621

bmiers@mlac.org

**Report Finds 90 Percent of African-Americans and Latinos are Isolated in the Lowest
“Opportunity” Neighborhoods in Massachusetts**

*“The Geography of Opportunity: Building Communities of Opportunity in Massachusetts”
Released Today*

BOSTON (January 12, 2009) – Although the recent economic downturn has had a dramatic impact on low-income families, people of color and immigrant populations, a new report shows these groups face geographically determined barriers to success even in strong economic times.

Massachusetts legal aid programs, together with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University and the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School, today announced findings of the report “The Geography of Opportunity: Building Communities of Opportunity in Massachusetts” at a public launch at the State House featuring representatives of the Patrick administration and the legislature, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and Harvard School of Public Health.

The report compiles research conducted by the Kirwan Institute on behalf of Massachusetts legal aid programs and reveals that critical building blocks of opportunity are out of reach for many Massachusetts residents who are isolated – most often by race – in neighborhoods of low opportunity. According to the Kirwan Institute, “opportunity” is measured by a number of factors, including access to high quality education, a healthy and safe environment, and sustainable employment, and isolation from opportunity impacts an individual’s quality of life, financial stability and social advancement.

“Since 2003, the Kirwan Institute has conducted opportunity mapping for more than a dozen regions and states across the country,” says John A. Powell, executive director of the Kirwan Institute, who was one of the featured speakers at the launch event. “While we often find that to varying degrees people of color are isolated in low-opportunity neighborhoods, we were surprised to find that Massachusetts has one of the highest rates of this type of isolation among all of the communities we studied.”

The Massachusetts Opportunity Mapping Initiative assessed how low-income groups and racial, ethnic and immigrant populations are distributed in the Commonwealth’s “geography of opportunity.” The study used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and extensive data sets, including U.S. Census data from 2000. Some key findings of the report include:

- Isolation from opportunity along racial lines is very evident in Massachusetts. More than 90 percent of African American and Latino households in 2000 were isolated in the lowest opportunity neighborhoods in the Commonwealth, compared to 56 percent of Asian households and 31 percent of White, non-Latino households.

- Racial isolation into low-opportunity neighborhoods is far more pronounced than class-based segregation into these low-opportunity communities. Ninety-five percent of low-income Latino households, 93 percent of low-income African-Americans households and 71 percent of low-income Asian households were found in low-opportunity neighborhoods in Massachusetts in 2000, compared to 43 percent of low-income White, non-Latino households.
- Non-native U.S. residents from Africa and Latin America were far more likely to be concentrated in low-opportunity neighborhoods in Massachusetts, compared to immigrants from Europe or Asia. Seventy percent of African-born and Latin American-born households were concentrated in the state's low-opportunity neighborhoods in 2000, compared to 42 percent of European-born households and 46 percent of Asian-born households.

Harvard Law School's Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice was a co-sponsor of the launch. The Institute was founded by Executive Director Charles Ogletree to continue the unfinished work of Charles Hamilton Houston, a central architect of the civil rights strategy leading to *Brown v. Board of Education*.

"The Institute is very pleased to participate in the launch of this important research on the geography of opportunity," says David J. Harris, managing director of the Houston Institute. "In the spirit of Charles Hamilton Houston, we are committed to working with the legal aid programs that sponsored the research as well as other advocacy organizations in communities across the Commonwealth to reduce this isolation and increase access to opportunity for all residents."

The report and launch was coordinated by a committee of Massachusetts legal aid programs. There are 21 federally and state-funded civil legal aid programs throughout the Commonwealth, which provide legal information, advice and representation to low-income Massachusetts residents with civil legal problems such as domestic violence, foreclosure, income maintenance, and more.

"The findings of this report will be instrumental in targeting our resources more effectively and refining our advocacy on behalf of low-income clients," says Francisca Fajana, staff attorney for the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. "Because legal aid programs reach every neighborhood in Massachusetts, we are uniquely positioned to partner with other community advocacy organizations, as well as the state and local governments, to create strategies for distributing opportunity more evenly."

The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity was established in 2003 as a center for interdisciplinary research at The Ohio State University. The Kirwan Institute partners with people, communities and institutions worldwide to think about, talk about and act on race in ways that create and expand opportunity for all.

The full report can be found at <http://www.mlac.org>. For more information on the Kirwan Institute, visit: <http://kirwaninstitute.org>, and for more information on the Houston Institute, visit: <http://www.charleshamiltonhouston.org>.