

# LEGAL AID LINK

Volume 10, Issue 1

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Want to see your news in *Legal Aid Link*? Send it to the person responsible for communications and development at your organization. The next issue will be published in May 2016.

*Visit our website to read previous issues.*

## MLAC

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### Constituent Services Briefing Rescheduled

MLAC's Constituent Services Briefing, scheduled for February 8th, was cancelled due to inclement weather. We are working to reschedule the event in late March or early April at the State House.

## Equal Justice Coalition

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### Over 600 Attorneys Walk to the Hill to Call for Increased Funding for Civil Legal Aid



On January 28, over 600 attorneys attended the 17th Annual Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid in support of MLAC's request for a \$10 million increase in funding for civil legal aid in FY17. During the event, attendees heard from speakers including Chief Justice Ralph Gants of the Supreme Judicial Court, Attorney General Maura Healey, Boston Bar Association President Lisa Arrowood, and Massachusetts Bar Association President Bob Harnais. Also speaking was Lisa, a legal aid client from Medford, who shared how an attorney at Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) [helped re-instate](#) her son's health care coverage so he could continue the drug treatment program that saved his life. Another highlight of the program was the debut of [a video](#) depicting the struggle faced by low-income litigants in housing court in Massachusetts, many of whom are forced to represent themselves.

### I Walk for Justice Campaign

This year, the Equal Justice Coalition brought back its successful "I Walk for Justice" social media campaign in the weeks before Walk to the Hill. Attorneys and other civil legal aid advocates—including Diane Patrick, co-managing partner of Ropes & Gray's Boston office and former first lady of Massachusetts (pictured)—shared their reasons for supporting civil legal aid and attending Walk to the Hill. See more photos from the campaign and Walk to the Hill [on Twitter](#).



### Get Involved—Contact Your Legislators Today!

Right now, legislators are making budget decisions that will decide the fate of civil legal aid in Massachusetts. Please take a minute to [send an email to your state representative and state senator](#) and urge them to support \$27 million in civil legal aid funding in FY 17. Looking for other ways to get involved in the budget campaign? Follow the EJC [on Twitter](#), like the [EJC Facebook page](#) and sign up for action alerts at [www.equaljusticecoalition.org](http://www.equaljusticecoalition.org).

## Save the Date

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**March 10-11:** The National Consumer Law Center's holds its *Fair Debt Collection Practices Conference* in Miami, Florida. The training features introductory and advanced tracks with top experts from around the nation. Earn up to 14 hours of CLE credit. [Register now!](#)

**May 2:** *4th Annual Legal Services Conference: How legal aid makes a difference*

Legal aid and pro bono advocates from across the state will convene to discuss the impact of legal aid, and the different avenues legal aid can take to make a difference. The conference will be held at Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education (MCLE), 10 Winter Place, Boston. [View the agenda and register here.](#)

**May 13:** The Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee hosts a full-day conference, *Students Down the Pipeline: Who Gets Punished?* The conference examines the school-to-prison pipeline from the unique perspective of how implicit racial bias and the stigma of mental illness interact in school to disparately impact students of color with disabilities in myriad ways. This training is open to everyone—attorneys, clinicians, educators, students, families, and others will benefit from the full day of lecture, discussion, and interactive breakout sessions. The program will be held at MCLE, 10 Winter Place, Boston. To view the program agenda and register, [visit the MHLAC website.](#)

## Advocacy & Program Updates

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The Center for Law and Education (CLE) and the Children's Law Center of Massachusetts filed an amicus brief in a matter on direct review to the Supreme Judicial Court, on behalf of a student who, without legal counsel, was wrongfully excluded from school her senior year in high school. CLE contends that school officials misapplied a state law that authorizes a principal to suspend a student who has a felony or felony delinquency complaint issued against her for out-of-school behavior if, as a result of the felony charge, the principal determines that the student's continued presence in school would be detrimental to the school's welfare. In this case, no felony charge was issued against this student who, without legal representation, was also suspended without a due process hearing in violation of state statutory and constitutional law. Sky Kochenour, a new attorney and BU Law graduate who is working as a fellow at CLE, is primary counsel on the brief; he was assisted by attorney and Racial Justice Fellow Jenny Chou.

CLE joined the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Multicultural Education, Training & Advocacy, Inc. to [challenge the Ôlifting of the cap](#) on charter schools in Massachusetts on behalf of proposed defendant intervenors, namely, the New England chapter of the NAACP and seven Boston Public School students, including English language learners, students with disabilities, and students of color who are underrepresented and subjected to harsh and discriminatory discipline push-out practices by the charter schools. The charter cap suit was filed last fall on behalf of five students who allege that because they are on waitlists for charter schools, they are being denied a constitutionally adequate public education. The defendants in the case include several high-profile proponents for lifting the charter cap, a key reason why the would-be intervenors believe their participation in the lawsuit is critical.

On January 19, Greater Boston Legal Services held its annual Client/Staff Lobby Event. Despite bone-chilling temperatures, approximately 70 clients and community partners went to Beacon Hill to share with their legislators their

stories of civil legal aid's impact on their lives and lobby for a \$10 million increase to the MLAC line item. Attendees visited 15 senators and 28 representatives and had a successful and inspiring day at the State House!



Community Legal Aid (CLA) staff participated in the annual Walk to the Hill on January 28. CLA had 33 meetings with lawmakers and their staff to discuss the importance of legal aid services and increasing funding in the 2017 budget. See more photos [here](#).



From right to left: Jonathan Mannina, Corinne Ryan, Billy Peard, Talia Gee, Hisham Leil, Steve Taviner, and Dan Bahls.

Susan Cole, director of Massachusetts Advocates for Children's (MAC) Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, and Alice Wolf, former Massachusetts State Representative and MAC Senior Advisor, were quoted in a [WBUR story](#) about kindergarten suspensions. Shortly after the story was published, the UP Network, which is responsible for the most kindergarten suspensions of any school in the state, banned them all together.

MAC recently released a series of videos created by one of its [Young Adult Leaders](#), Val MacIver. The videos, called *The Teachings of Val*, detail her journey with autism from diagnosis to self-advocacy. Learn more about Val and the process of creating the videos [on the MAC website](#).

The National Consumer Law Center(NCLC) has released several new reports:

á [Deceptive Bargain: The Hidden Trap of Deferred Interest Credit Cards](#), Dec. 2015

á Updated Report: [Ensuring Educational Integrity: 10 Steps to Improve State Oversight of For-Profit Schools](#), June 2014,

á [Update to Step 2: Protecting Online Education Students](#), Dec. 2015

á [Account Screening Consumer Reporting Agencies \(Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund, NCLC and Bank On\)](#), Oct. 2015

## People

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CLA has welcomed several new staff members over the past few months. **Katrina Conley** started in June 2015 as a volunteer attorney in the housing unit and was later hired as a housing staff attorney. **Jena Gutierrez** was hired in November as a pro bono coordinator in Worcester. In December, **Elizabeth Alfred** joined the housing unit as a staff attorney in Worcester. In January two new staff attorneys joined the Central West Justice Center. **Blair Komar** started as a public benefits staff attorney in Worcester, and **Gina Plata-Nino** was hired as a staff attorney for the food security project, a collaboration with CLA and the Worcester County Food Bank. **Catherine Kay** recently joined CLA as a staff attorney for the family law unit in Northampton.

**Will Ogburn** retired in December, after serving at NCLC for nearly 40 years, 28 years as executive director. Will, pictured at right with Chief Justice Ralph Gants, has spent his career fighting on behalf of low-income consumers and will continue to do so, remaining at NCLC as a

senior fellow.



**Richard Dubois** has been appointed as NCLC's executive director, effective January 1, 2016. Rich has been at NCLC for 18 years, having served as deputy director and director of development and project planning. He began at NCLC as a staff attorney focusing on sustainable homeownership. Previously he was an attorney at the Center for Insurance Research in Cambridge, Mass. He earned a B.A. from Yale University and a J.D. from the University of Michigan.

**Carolyn Carter** has been promoted to deputy director of NCLC. Previously, she was director of advocacy. Carolyn has been with NCLC for more than a decade and previously spent 25 years working with legal aid programs in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

## Awards & Recognition

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At the annual Region 9A UAW Civil and Human Rights Awards Recognition Dinner in January, **Monica Halas**, GBLS Employment Law Unit Lead Attorney, was honored for her unique ability to unify labor leaders around myriad issues that affect GBLS clients and other low-wage workers, through her legislative work, including employment reform, paid sick days, temporary workers' right to know, and the domestic workers bill of rights. Halas was recognized for these achievements and for her years of leadership as a member of UAW Local 2320 and as a Vice President of the Mass AFL-CIO.

**Lydia Edwards**, GBLS employment attorney and Equal Justice Works Fellow, received an honorable mention in the Boston Globe Magazine's [2015 Bostonian of the Year](#) list.



## Media Highlights

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**These are just a few highlights of recent media coverage. For a full list, visit the [News section of the MLAC website.](#)**

[MetroWest Legal Services advocates for more funding](#) (MetroWest Daily News)

MetroWest Legal Services Executive Director Betsy Soule describes the challenges and difficult decisions faced by legal aid programs as they allocate scarce resources and are forced to turn away eligible residents who seek their help.

[Legal aid community to call for \\$10 million budget boost](#) (Metro Boston)

Metro covers the Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid, highlighting the story of the event's client speaker, whose son, in recovery from heroin abuse, nearly lost the health coverage that allows him to access methadone treatment and stay clean.

[Evictions in East Boston: The Push for a 'Just Cause' Ordinance](#) (Radio Boston, WBUR)

With rising rents and increased displacement of longtime residents in East Boston, housing advocates are calling for a so-called "just cause" eviction ordinance that would make it more difficult to evict tenants simply because rents are rising.

[Whistleblower, parents describe abuses in program for disabled students](#) (Boston Globe)

The Boston Globe details the allegations against The Peck School in Holyoke, where numerous abuses of students were uncovered thanks to the work of whistleblower Liza Hirsch and a subsequent investigation by the Disability Law Center.

[Prisoners' rights advocates say pregnant inmates still being shackled during labor](#) (Springfield Republican)  
Prisoners' Legal Services and other prisoners' rights groups say that not all jails are complying with a 2014 law prohibiting the shackling of pregnant inmates, and that no statewide health standards have been created for pregnant incarcerated women.

## People Pages

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[CLICK HERE](#) to print "People Pages," an alphabetical directory of Massachusetts Legal Services staff members and their contact information. (Note: You must log in to MassLegalServices.org to access this list.) You can also look up staff individually by last name using the search function on MassLegalServices.org



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