

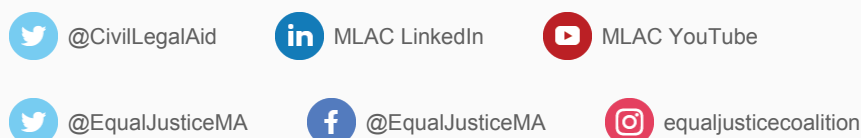
News from the Massachusetts legal aid community.

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LEGAL AID LINK

Volume 13, Issue 1 - Winter 2019

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Highlights in this issue...

[MLAC Executive Director Lynne Parker on MassBar Beat podcast](#)
[EJC rallies hundreds at State House for Walk to the Hill for Civil Legal Aid](#)
[Updates from the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Council](#)
[Legal aid advocacy in the news](#)

Visit the updated [news page](#) on the MLAC website for more articles featuring the work of Massachusetts legal aid organizations ð there was too much good news to fit here!

De Novo

Community Legal Services and Counseling Center recently changed its name to **De Novo Center for Justice and Healing**. They have a new name, but the same mission. [Read more.](#)

Lynne Parker on MassBar Beat Podcast

MassBar Beat, a podcast produced by the Massachusetts Bar Association, featured MLAC Executive Director Lynne Parker in January. She discussed MLAC's role in supporting legal aid organizations and the importance of increasing state funding for civil legal aid. [Listen here.](#)



Equal Justice Coalition

Walk to the Hill 2019 Attracts Hundreds

At the Walk to the Hill on January 24, roughly 700

lawyers, law students, and legal aid staffers assembled at the State House to advocate for increased funding for civil legal aid. The event featured Ralph Gants, Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court, and Fred Connelly, a Quincy resident and Greater Boston Legal Services client who kept his house with the help of legal aid. Attendees advocated for a \$5 million increase for legal aid, and made 250 distinct visits to legislators' offices. [Read more](#)



#IWalkforJustice trends on Twitter



The EJC's #IWalkforJustice social media campaign was a huge success this year. On January 24, for the first time ever, our hashtag, #IWalkforJustice, was trending in the Boston area! Thank you to all who participated!

Chief Justice Gants advocates for legal aid on WGBH

At the end of January, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Ralph Gants appeared on WGBH program *Greater Boston* and spoke with host Jim Braude about state funding for civil legal aid, among other topics. [Watch video](#).

Client Stories

MLAC and the EJC highlight the stories of legal aid clients, attorneys, and community members to educate the public about the importance of legal aid, support the EJC's budget campaign, and demonstrate the many ways civil legal aid can help vulnerable people. If you or someone you know has a story to share, please contact Laura Booth at lbooth@equaljusticecoalition.org and Michelle Deakin, MLAC Communications Director, at mdeakin@mlac.org. We're also adding client stories and video to the [MLAC website](#).

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Council

The statewide DEI Council will hold its next meeting on March 27 at the MLAC office in Boston. For more information, contact Tonysha Taylor, MLAC Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, at ttaylor@mlac.org.

In January, the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network partnered with YW Boston to facilitate a dialogue series on race in Boston. Two members of the Massachusetts legal aid community participated:

Andrea Carrillo, Attorney, GBLS: "The YW/MNN Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity provided members of the non-profit community a thoughtful opportunity to engage in discussions about race and provided each participant with the tools to begin to implement positive changes within their organizations. The program provided a safe space to begin to understand where our own perspectives and viewpoints come from and also understand and embrace the differences of other colleagues."

Evan Molinari, Communications Associate, MLAC: "Conversations around race and privilege are often difficult, and this was no exception. However, the skill of the facilitators, the safe space they created, and the earnest and open outlook that every participant brought with them introduced me to new ways of thinking and a deeper personal understanding of my privilege and my role in fighting racism. I left every session feeling emotionally raw, but also very hopeful."

Legal Aid in the News & other Advocacy Updates

Mass. High Court Considers Whether Farm Workers Should've Gotten Overtime Pay

Staff Attorney **Susan Garcia Nofi** of Community Legal Aid's subsidiary, the Central West Justice Center argued at the SJC representing workers fighting to receive overtime pay for their work in a beansprout processing plant in Whatley, Massachusetts. [Listen](#) on New England Public Radio.

Whitinsville man files \$1M suit against retirement home

Community Legal Aid lawyers **Maureen R. St. Cyr** and **Ray Mestre** filed a lawsuit on behalf of a 73-year-old Whitinsville man who alleges that the owners of his retirement home violated the Fair Housing

Act by illegally pressuring him to leave the home on the basis of disability and religion. [Read more](#) in the *Worcester Telegram*.

ÒAs rents soar in Boston, low-income tenants try to stave off evictionÓ

GBLS attorneys **Zoe Cronin** and **Margaret Turner** were featured in a detailed article by the New England Center for Investigative Reporting and *Boston Globe Magazine* on access to justice in Boston Housing Court.

Central West Justice Center actively engaged in commenting on the proposed rule regarding Ópublic charge.Ó We invited and encouraged clients, community partners, and community members to draft comments. We held various Ócomment partiesÓ wherein we explained the effect of public charge on our communities and how to draft compelling comments opposing it.



ÒIn Defense of Housing CourtÓ

Northeast Legal Aid AmeriCorps attorney Molly Victoria Lovell penned a powerful letter to the editor on access to justice in housing court. [Read more](#) in *The Daily Item*.

Innocent spouses will now get tax relief in Massachusetts, thanks to the LegislatureÓs support and advocacy by **GBLSÓ** Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC), **Massachusetts Law Reform Institute**, and a broad coalition of organizations against domestic violence. In January 2019, Gov. Baker signed into law An Act Providing for Equitable Relief from Liability for Joint Filers of Tax Returns that provides expanded tax relief for many spouses, including survivors of domestic violence. Now, a married or divorced taxpayer will not be held jointly liable for the tax owed by the spouse that cheated on taxes nor liable for the entire amount.

The **Northeast Justice Center** responded to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids targeting New EnglandÓs Cambodian-American communities. Two Cambodian clients, who had arrived in the United States as child-refugees in the early 1980s and who had built careers and families, were arrested and detained without warning by ICE outside their homes. The Justice Center filed habeas petitions in federal district court in Boston alleging violations of their constitutional rights and demanding their release. ICE agreed to release both clients from custody, and both are living at home with their families once more.

The **Center for Law and Education** submitted comments to the U.S. Dept. of Education in response to a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking under Title IX issued by Secretary DeVos after she rescinded guidance issued by the Obama administration. While disagreeing with many of the changes, CLE supported the proposed higher standard of review and extension of due process rights to both the complainant and the respondent. [Click here](#) to read CLEÓs comments; [click here](#) to read the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

CLE also kicked off the first of multiple training sessions to prepare its initial class of lay advocates who will assist Boston Public School students - otherwise unrepresented and at risk of short-term suspension Ó at school disciplinary hearings. CLEÓs Access to Justice through Lay Advocacy Project aims to reduce exclusions from school for non-violent, non-drug, school code offenses and help students stay in school to learn. Contact Sky Kochenour by phone (617-451-0855) or e-mail (skochenour@cleweb.org).

For more news, visit MLACÓs news page!

Save the Date

May 16, 2019, 5:30 pm Ó 7:30 pm: Please join the **Disability Law Center** for a light dinner and cocktail reception to celebrate its 40th Anniversary at the Royal Sonesta in Cambridge. DLC will honor community partners and companies that strive to increase workforce opportunities for people with disabilities and enhance their disability inclusion efforts. Tickets Ó \$125 each Ó Includes light dinner, beer & wine.



Date TBD: Community Legal Aid will be holding an open house this spring at their **new office** at 515 Main Street, **Fitchburg** to welcome the community and celebrate increased access for the Northern Worcester County community.

Event Recap

Massachusetts Advocates for Children, in partnership with the Massachusetts Coalition for Special Education Funding, hosted a Special Education Circuit Breaker briefing on February 6 at the State House. Supporters called for full funding of the Special Education Circuit Breaker account. [Read more.](#)

People

Joining **Community Legal Aid and the Central West Justice Center** are: **J. Lizette Richards**, CWJC's new employment attorney, and **Valdir Cabral**, CWJC's new public benefits staff attorney; both based in CWJC's Springfield office. Staffing CLAO's new office in Fitchburg at 515 Main Street, are new hires Attorney **Daniel Schneider** working in the Housing unit; Attorney **Eleanor Cashman** who will be working in the public benefits and elder law areas, and receptionist **Raydi Fontrias-Soto**.

New to **Northeast Legal Aid** are: **Laura Gal**, Supervisory Attorney for the Family Law Unit. Laura is a former employee of CLA and continues working part time with the Access to Justice Commission. **Sarah O'Brien** joined NLA as a family law attorney. **Ellen Crowley** joined NLA to lead the Caretakers of Children at Risk project that addresses issues involving families impacted by the opioid epidemic. **Ana Otero** and **Camila Valenzuela** both joined **Northeast Justice Center** and will be working in the NJC Immigration Unit.

South Coastal Counties Legal Services hired **Clare McGorrian** as the Intake Supervising Attorney based in the Fall River Law Office. She brings decades of experience serving low income clients, most recently as senior staff attorney at Health Law Advocates.

Long-time SCCLS Staff Attorney **Carol Schafer** recently retired. Carol began working from the Hyannis Law Office in 1989. Prior to SCCLS, Carol worked for legal service organizations in Kentucky, Cambridge and Somerville, and the National Consumer Law Center. During the time Carol worked as a Disability Benefits Project attorney, she assisted clients in obtaining or protecting nearly \$10 million in SSI/SSDI benefits. Her clients have been extremely appreciative of her efforts over the years. Please wish her a very happy and well-deserved retirement after a long career helping low-income community members attain stability through her lifetime of disability benefits advocacy.

Awards

Several legal aid attorneys have recently been honored for their work. Congratulations to all!

GBLS Attorney **Ventura Dennis**, of the CORI and Re-entry Project, was honored with the 2019 BU School of Law Public Interest Alumni Award, on February 28.

Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly selected **Central West Justice Center** for the 2019 Reginald Heber Smith Award for Excellence in Legal Services. CWJC will receive the award at MLW's Leaders in the Law award dinner on March 6.

Judith Liben of MLRI will receive the Massachusetts Bar Association's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Central West Justice Center Staff Attorney **Gina Plata-Nino** will receive this year's Mass. Bar Association Rising Star Award. Gina is being honored for her passionate and effective advocacy in the SNAP/food security arena and the energy and dedication she brings to her community outreach, including her outstanding efforts on behalf of families displaced from their homes in Puerto Rico by Hurricane Maria.

GBLS Senior Attorney **Luz Arzvalo** will receive the Massachusetts Bar Association's 2019 Legal Services Access to Justice Award for her outstanding dedication to clients and her creative advocacy. In addition to securing tax relief for countless individuals, Luz successfully lobbied for an increase in the state earned income tax credit. Luz drafted and secured first-in-the-nation language that creates a safe way for abused and abandoned spouses to access the EITC. Luz's solution will satisfy the joint-filing requirements by allowing a domestic violence survivor to collect the EITC if she is living apart from the abuser and cannot file a joint return because she is a survivor of domestic abuse.

GBLS Senior Attorney **Nancy Lorenz** will be a 2019 recipient of the Boston Center for Independent Living Marie Feltin Award, which honors people and organizations who make a difference for people with disabilities. For more details please see <https://bostoncil.org/events/marie-feltin-2019-2/>

New Resources from the National Consumer Law Center

New Digital Library Articles

New Issue Briefs

Reports and State Model Laws:

- [How HUD is Failing to Protect Widows and Widowers of Reverse Mortgage Borrowers: Case Studies and Recommendations](#), November 2018
- [Student Loan Relief after a Disaster: Your Guide to Temporary and Long-Term Relief Options](#), January 2018
- [The Dark Side of Payroll Withholding to Repay Student Loans](#), February, 2019
- [Model Law: Transparent and Consistent Pricing of Motor Vehicle Add-Ons Act](#), December 2018
- [Model Law: Safer Cars at the Point of Sale Act](#), December 2018

Stay in touch with MLAC Communications

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