

Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

Line item #0321-1600

CO-SPONSOR REP. BALSER AMENDMENT #157 TO PROVIDE \$17 MILLION IN FUNDING FOR CIVIL LEGAL AID

(Rep. Binienda's Amendment #247 would also provide \$17 million for civil legal aid.)

Please co-sponsor Representative Balser's MLAC Amendment #157.

- The House Ways & Means FY15 budget proposal provides \$13 million level funding for civil legal aid in the MLAC line item (#0321-1600). House 2 recommended \$14 million.
- \$17 million in funding for civil legal aid will allow programs to hire 40 more attorneys, thereby expanding services to vulnerable residents across the state and boosting the state's economy.

Civil legal aid assures fairness for all in the justice system, regardless of income.

- It provides access to legal help for people to protect their livelihoods, their health, and their families.
- It also makes it easier for eligible clients to access information and legal forms through public websites, hotlines and lawyer-for-the-day programs.
- Civil legal aid also helps ease the strain of unrepresented people on the already overburdened court system.

Adequate funding for civil legal aid provides economic benefits for our state.

- In FY10, civil legal aid generated an estimated \$78 million in new federal revenues and cost savings to the state.
- Due in part to decreased funding, that amount fell to \$48 million in Fiscal Year 2012 (FY12) and \$28 million in FY13 (\$10 million in new federal revenues alone).

Funding for civil legal aid has plummeted since 2008.

- MLAC's Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) revenues to MLAC have drastically declined, from \$17 million in FY08 to a projected \$2.6 million in FY14 (an 85% dive).

At the same time, the need for civil legal aid has grown.

- Close to 1 million people in Massachusetts are currently struggling to survive on incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level, or \$573 per week for a family of four.
- Local programs are forced to turn away 50% to 70% of eligible residents seeking help with complex legal matters such as domestic violence, eviction and foreclosure, elder abuse and denial of veterans' benefits due to inadequate funding.

House members may sign on to Amendment #157 in the House Clerk's Office.

For more information, contact Elaine O'Reilly at 617-523-7808 x124, Mary Ann Walsh at 617-447-3711, or Lonnie Powers at 617-367-1414.

About MLAC: The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation was established by the Commonwealth 30 years ago to ensure that low-income people with critical, non-criminal legal problems would have access to legal information, advice and representation. For more information, visit www.mlac.org.