

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

### **MASSACHUSETTS LAW REFORM INSTITUTE**

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**Boston, MA 02111**

**[www.mlri.org](http://www.mlri.org)**

***“Promoting economic, racial and social justice for low-income people through legal action, education and advocacy”***

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) seeks a creative, vibrant and skilled Executive Director to lead a powerful advocacy organization in strengthening its mission of combating poverty, removing barriers to opportunity and promoting stability and self-sufficiency among low-income people. A 40-year track record of success in the courts, the legislature and dozens of federal and state agencies together with a dedicated staff that provides skilled, collaborative, back-up support to a broad range of legal services providers throughout Massachusetts have made MLRI a nationally respected law reform organization and the backbone of a highly effective state-wide legal service system. With the retirement of its founding Executive Director, MLRI now seeks a talented new leader to partner with its Board, staff, valued constituents and supporters in championing the rights and opportunities of low-income people at a time of significant economic and social challenge.

#### **Overview of the Organization and its Programs**

MLRI is a 501(c)(3) organization with a budget of approximately \$2 million, a 19 member Board of Directors, a full-time Executive Director and approximately twenty-three professional staff members. Its dedicated and highly experienced attorneys and advocates are widely respected as experts in their fields and have achieved far-reaching advocacy victories that have collectively improved the lives and dignity of low-income people throughout the increasingly multi-racial, multi-ethnic communities of Massachusetts. Together with its allies, MLRI has won these victories in significant and wide-ranging areas of law, including Civil Rights, Court Reform, Employment, Family and Child Welfare, Health Care, Housing and Homelessness, Immigration, Public Benefits and Racial Equity, among others. Successful MLRI victories are exemplified by:

- Enactment of the state’s first equitable zoning laws, creating over 55,000 affordable housing units for working families, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities;
- Reform of the Massachusetts criminal records access laws that have erroneously kept a disproportionate share of African American, Latino and other people of color out of the work force;
- Successful creative policy advocacy resulting in a three-fold increase since 2002 in participation of low income Massachusetts residents in the federal nutrition program (SNAP) including low-wage working families, elders and persons with disabilities;
- A nationwide reform of the federal system for dispensing employment authorization documents to thousands of people granted asylum so they can work lawfully and without interruption.

MLRI advocates litigate and serve as co-counsel in high-impact cases, offer testimony and track legislative priorities, provide detailed budgetary analysis for legislators, negotiate and comment on public policies and regulations, research and document inequities, track racial disparities in income and wealth, advance progressive solutions to systemic problems that affect low-income people and share effective solutions and strategies with other advocacy groups and policy makers. MLRI provides critical assistance and support to others through training, advice and coordination of statewide coalitions and manages two legal services websites which provide additional resources for attorneys and advocates.

MLRI responds to changes in the social and economic environment in a flexible and proactive manner by identifying trends and working with clients, allies and pro-bono law firms to design, develop and implement effective strategies to meet emerging needs, and initiating, supporting and fueling efforts to address critical policy issues as they arise.

### **Strategic Challenges and Opportunities Facing MLRI**

MLRI is at a crossroads in which it must respond to new environmental, funding and strategic challenges, and seeks a dynamic leader who will shepherd the organization through its next stage of evolution at a time of significant upheaval that has impacted low-income communities and the organization internally. MLRI staff and Board are responding creatively by identifying strategic opportunities to attract a broader, more diverse donor and funder base and by developing a compelling communication strategy about the pressing threats to economic, racial and social justice that make MLRI's mission more important than ever. Specific challenges and opportunities ahead for the organization include:

Funding and fund development - The current funding environment poses a significant challenge for MLRI. Historically, funding has come primarily through the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) which administers an annual state appropriation and is a conduit for IOLTA funds (interest on lawyers trust accounts). The economic downturn has had a significant impact on these resources which, in turn, has diminished the funds available to MLRI. Efforts to broaden the funding base are beginning to reap rewards but MLRI leaders are taking nothing for granted as they work to eliminate a projected deficit for FY 2011. Simultaneous with diminished financial resources, the complexity of problems faced by legal service providers in the state has increased, creating additional demands on MLRI services and assistance. Developing a sustainable funding model for MLRI's future will be an important priority for a new Executive that will, hopefully, emerge from strategies identified in a collaborative planning process.

Organizational planning and strategic positioning - This effort promises to be a significant opportunity for a new Executive to work with a broad range of stakeholders to envision and plan the future of MLRI. There is general agreement internally and externally that it is time for MLRI to become more visible and to initiate with its clients and partners a robust and comprehensive planning process that takes a broad look at legal services in the state and optimizes MLRI's role and impact in a new environment. MLRI staff and Board are excited about engaging in this effort and look forward to an energetic and creative exchange with MLRI allies, funders and constituents.

Maintaining a leadership position in the state and nationally – MLRI has justly earned a highly respected position as a local and national expert on reforms and remedies that have large-scale and long-term impact across a broad range of poverty law matters. While this success has been led by the departing Executive Director, the high level of expertise and leadership of MLRI staff and Board members have sustained and enhanced this reputation. All MLRI stakeholders believe it is important to maintain a strong and responsive relationship with local programs and an active, respected presence in the broader legal community both locally and nationally.

Cultivating the next generation - Another challenge facing the statewide legal services delivery system in which MLRI is key, is leadership development to bring in the next generation of legal services advocates. Developing thoughtful strategies for supporting and training newer advocates has the potential to present both challenge and opportunity. Of particular importance is a focus on the critical need to recruit and develop a talent pool that is racially and ethnically diverse and fully representative of the new demographic in this country and the low-income constituency served by MLRI and the broader legal service system.

### **Executive Transition**

MLRI's highly respected, long-term Executive Director, will retire on December 31, 2010. A Transition Committee composed of Board and staff leaders has undertaken development of a thoughtful and well-designed process to bridge the short-term leadership gap and to ensure confidence and continuity during the transition period.

### **Profile of the Ideal Candidate**

MLRI offers prospective candidates the opportunity to succeed a respected Executive who has been a strong leader and collaborator and whose contributions have played a significant part in shaping the powerful role of legal advocacy in the state of Massachusetts. MLRI Board and staff seek a new leader who has the capacity to generate similar respect among diverse audiences. MLRI's mission and values have attracted and retained an exceptional Board and staff team who are energized, dedicated and multi-talented. Maintaining the strength and effectiveness of MLRI's systemic advocacy and services, effectively leading Board and staff, and carefully managing the budget and finances of the organization are clear priorities for a new Director. However, the new Executive Director will also be evaluated on his or her ability to broaden, diversify and deepen the donor and funding base, to serve as an articulate and powerful public spokesperson for MLRI, and to initiate, lead and join effective and strategic efforts that further MLRI's mission and embrace and increase its diversity.

Specific skills and attributes of the ideal candidate will include:

### **Skills and Experience**

#### ***Passion for MLRI's Mission and Values***

The new Executive Director must demonstrate a passion for economic, racial and social justice and must evidence this passion in his or her personal and professional history. MLRI requires an articulate and persistent advocate for those who are disenfranchised and of low-

income, who is committed to addressing the profound connections between racial inequity and poverty and who values and promotes MLRI's critical imperative to pursue systemic change.

***Strategic Thinker and Thoughtful Visionary***

The need to take a comprehensive look at the legal services landscape and advocacy system and to undertake and lead a planning effort that includes and embraces the diversity and diverse perspectives of key stakeholders in deciding how to optimize the role, the focus and the contribution of MLRI going forward will require significant vision and open-minded, strategic thinking. Once a collaborative vision has been established, the Executive Director needs the leadership abilities and skills to design a successful approach and plan to integrate and implement that vision.

***Inclusive and Effective Leader and Manager***

The new Executive Director of MLRI will discover a staff team that is described as extraordinary and a Board that is dedicated, hard-working and has high expectations of itself and of staff. The ideal candidate for Executive Director will know how to inspire staff and how to work effectively with the Board to take advantage of its full potential. The Executive Director needs to be hands-on in their grasp of the work, capable of offering useful suggestions and resources to staff and able to exercise powerful leadership without micromanaging. Demonstrated, effective management experience that enthusiastically engages a smart, strong and racially and ethnically diverse staff team is a requirement for this position and an interest in designing strategies for developing internal staff and other advocates will be an attractive asset for the successful candidate.

***Significant Experience in Legal Services or Comparable Mission-Driven Advocacy***

MLRI's Executive Director will be asked to lead the effort to develop a meaningful and persuasive vision for the future of the organization that engages the passion and commitment of staff, Board and external stakeholders who are dedicated to systemic legal reform and advocacy. Given the nature and focus of MLRI's work, it is anticipated that the person selected as the new Executive Director will be a lawyer. However, an individual who is not a lawyer, but has a demonstrated knowledge of and commitment to meeting the legal needs of the low-income community along with the other required skills and attributes for the position will be considered.

***Exceptional Communicator and Collaborator***

The Executive Director of MLRI is the public face of an organization that is most often "opposing or supporting policies related to unpopular groups." The new Executive Director must be completely comfortable in that role and in knowing when to be "behind the scenes" and when to be "out in front." Effective external communication is essential. For MLRI this often means participating in, contributing to or leading extensive external dialogue in the broad legal community either in ad hoc efforts or on a variety of committees and commissions. MLRI's Executive Director must be able to listen carefully, speak persuasively, educate and respond effectively and bring to both internal and external discussions wisdom, humility, value and the ability to articulate powerfully the purpose, contribution and impact of legal advocacy and support. MLRI's constituents hope for a new Executive Director who is anxious to understand the issues facing local programs and to collaborate with them in setting the agenda for MLRI's advocacy and direction.

### ***Creative Fundraiser***

While the current funding environment poses challenges to all non-profits, including MLRI, Board and staff recognize that the skills of the new Executive must extend well beyond the ability to raise funds. Nonetheless, the skill and ability to get MLRI back on solid financial footing rates high on the list of skills needed in a new Executive Director. This implies the skill and ability to think creatively about MLRI's capabilities and assets and to articulate a vision for the organization's future in a manner that connects powerfully with funder and donor interests and concerns. It also implies a good understanding of the elements and demands of donor cultivation, including the strategic role of the Executive Director in implementation and follow-up, and a poised and proactive approach in assuming this role. Working with the Development Director, the Executive Director must help pursue traditional funding sources (individual donors, corporations and foundations) and non-traditional funding sources (cy pres awards, law firm partnerships and charitable trusts).

### ***Essential Technical Skills***

*Financial Competence* - The new Executive Director must have a firm and adept grasp of financial issues and detail, the ability to develop realistic and reliable budget projections and the competence and experience to implement MLRI's vision within realistic financial parameters.

*Competence in internal systems and technology* – It is hoped that the new Executive Director will have the ability to identify and implement internal systems that increase efficiency, streamline administrative tasks and define and facilitate documentation of outcomes. The capacity to exploit technology to track essential data, enhance organizational effectiveness, efficiency and impact – all of which are increasingly important to funders – are important skills for the new Executive Director. S/he must be conversant and comfortable with the technology equipment, uses and tools that will benefit the mission and purpose of MLRI, enhance its profile for funders and extend the effectiveness and reach of MLRI staff. S/he must have the skill and ability to introduce these tools and to achieve positive reception and adoption.

### **Attributes**

#### ***High Integrity***

Unquestioned integrity is essential to the effectiveness of the Executive Director, including the ability to operate “on the horizontal rather than the vertical level.” While enhanced visibility is increasing in importance for MLRI, an essential quality of the new Executive is appropriate humility and an intuitive understanding of when to give credit to others while exercising effective leadership.

#### ***Fairness, Respect and Responsiveness to Staff and Others***

Fairness, respect and responsiveness are important elements of MLRI culture and qualities that stakeholders value highly, along with an appreciation for the ability to be appropriately decisive in a timely way.

***Flexibility and a Sense of Humor***

The need for patience and persistence in addressing systemic change needs to be balanced with the flexibility that allows MLRI to be nimble in the face of emerging trends, challenges or opportunities and to position the organization to work with its constituents to address them effectively. The ability to face difficult challenges with grace and humor will be a valuable asset.

Because it is critical both to achieving MLRI's mission and to operating in a way that is consistent with MLRI's organizational values, MLRI strives for greater racial and ethnic diversity. Candidates from diverse backgrounds are encouraged to apply.

***This search is being conducted by Third Sector New England's Executive Transition Program ([www.tsne.org/etp](http://www.tsne.org/etp)) with Transition Consultant Margo Kelly. To express interest in this position, please send a resume and responsive cover letter to the Transition Committee at: [executive.search@earthlink.net](mailto:executive.search@earthlink.net). This position will be considered open until filled but resumes will be reviewed as they are received. Interested candidates are encouraged to submit their applications promptly.***

***November, 15, 2010***