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Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Co-Chair
State House, Room 243
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Senator Michael J. Rodrigues, Co-Chair
State House, Room 212
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Representative Kip A. Diggs
State House, Room 238
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Senator Joanne M. Comerford
State House, Room 410
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Representative Todd M. Smola
State House, Room 124
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Senator Patrick M. O'Connor
State House, Room 419
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

June 5, 2026

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 State Budget

Dear Conference Committee,

I write as President of the Boston Bar Association (BBA), a volunteer organization of 15,000 members drawn from private practice, corporations, government agencies, legal-aid organizations, the courts, and law schools. Our mission is to advance the highest standards of excellence for the legal profession, facilitate access to justice, serve the community at large, and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession.

I am writing to respectfully request your support for a number of items that are before you as you consider the Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) state budget. Adequate funding in these areas will ensure that the Commonwealth continues to provide access to justice for those who are deeply in need of support amidst the current economic uncertainty, housing instability, threats to federal supports in areas such as health-care, and other on-going challenges.

MLAC Funding

We greatly appreciate the Legislature's long history of support for civil legal aid through the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC). As you know, MLAC provides essential services to vulnerable people in our community and has helped Massachusetts families experiencing housing insecurity, inequitable educational opportunities, immigration proceedings,

and other real crises in the justice system that they should not have to face alone. These services offer assistance to residents in literally every House district and enjoy deep and wide support throughout the body. By increasing the number of low-income residents who have legal representation—and therefore feel that the system works for them—MLAC-funded programs, it is fair to say, help support faith in not only the courts but democracy as a whole.

Increased state investments over the past several years have correlated with a significant decline in the number of eligible residents being turned away from legal assistance, from 64% to about 40% over the past decade. While this achievement is admirable, important unmet needs for civil legal services remain. More resources are desperately needed to ensure that low-income and vulnerable residents of Massachusetts receive equal access to justice. Therefore, the **BBA strongly urges you to support the House’s figure of \$52 million for MLAC** (line item 0321-1600).

This funding will help keep low-income tenants housed, protect victims of domestic violence, and connect special-needs students with the services they need. Furthermore, the BBA’s own reports on civil legal aid provide evidence that funding full representation in these types of cases saves the Commonwealth money. Our 2014 report, [*Investing in Justice*](#), illustrated that MLAC-funded legal services programs reduce “back-end” costs such as emergency shelter, foster care, and health-care.

With an eye toward housing in particular, our 2020 update to that report, using refreshed data on eviction cases, [*Investing in Justice, Fairness, and Housing Stability*](#), again demonstrated a positive return on investment in legal representation in that area. Indeed, MLAC estimates that in the last fiscal year, MLAC-funded civil legal programs offered an overall economic benefit of more than \$113 million to the Commonwealth and its residents, while helping 99,000 people throughout our state.

Increasing civil legal aid funding will help address a broad range of needs across the Commonwealth, save the state money during challenging times, and preserve access to justice for the most vulnerable in our community. Therefore, **we respectfully request your support for the \$52 million appropriation for MLAC** in the FY27 Budget.

Trial Court

As you know, the Trial Court’s seven departments handle all of the cases filed in the Commonwealth’s courts. In a very real sense, the Trial Court is the “face” of justice in the Commonwealth. Over the past decade-plus, the Trial Court has made great strides in finding ways to work smarter and leverage technological advancements to get more done with less. The pandemic has served to both demonstrate the value of those gains and underscore the need for increased investment in the Trial Court.

It is essential that our courts remain adequately funded. Thus, we request that you **support the higher funding level for each line-item of the Trial Court** in the FY27 Budget, so that it may continue to carry out its work as needed for the benefit of the Commonwealth.

Access to Counsel

Access to legal representation makes all the difference for individuals in housing proceedings. The BBA has long supported legal counsel for low-income tenants and landlords in eviction cases, and a [2020 BBA Report](#) demonstrated that providing full representation in such cases would benefit the Commonwealth.

The benefits of housing stability for families and children in Massachusetts cannot be overstated, which is why we are so grateful to the

Legislature for approving the creation of a statewide Access to Counsel

Program (ATCP), with \$2.5 million in funding, in the current FY26 budget. This program has leveled the playing field by providing representation to owner-occupant landlords who could not otherwise obtain counsel and to tenants who would almost always have to appear alone opposite an attorney if not for the ATCP. And it ultimately produced positive outcomes: [Among them, in 87% of cases closed in 2025, the eviction was prevented or delayed.](#)

As members of the [Access to Counsel Coalition](#), we are now respectfully requesting your **support again for inclusion of language in the FY27 budget to establish a permanent Access to Counsel Program, along with \$3 million in funding** (line item 0321- 1800), as provided in H. 5501, to continue the work on this program that has already begun for both low-income tenants and low-income owner-occupants in eviction proceedings.

Given current economic conditions and the resurgence in evictions across the state over the past several years, we ask that you consider this program as a part of the solution for creating a more affordable state, promoting community stability, and improving the quality of life for residents of the Commonwealth.

The BBA asks for your help with these priorities, which are necessary to provide equal access to the courts and justice for all residents of the Commonwealth. Thank you, again, for your past support for all of these items, and for fighting for greater access and equity in the Commonwealth. We appreciate your careful consideration of the above requests.

Sincerely,



Suma V. Nair
BBA President

cc: Senate President Karen Spilka
House Speaker Ronald Mariano
Co-Chair Michael Day, Joint Committee on the Judiciary
Co-Chair Lydia Edwards, Joint Committee on the Judiciary