

# 70 Years of Fighting for Justice



Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I was very impressed with your knowledge and appreciate your insights about my case.

I have already sent my application at your suggestion. Your help is invaluable and I will keep you posted with any update.

When you take on our legal issues, you're allowing us to close one chapter forever and begin to dream of a brighter future. There is no greater gift.

Muchas gracias  
Por toda su ayuda  
Y Apoyo brindado  
estamos muy  
agradecidos.

Thank you for your great kindness and the period after the apartment that you took us with a thank us to have dinner the night of your hearing always please i your kindness which helped a great deal.

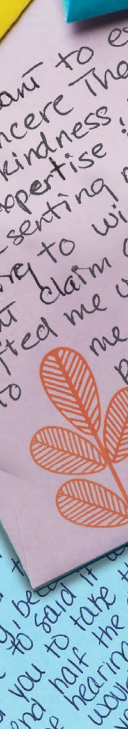
I want to express my sincere thanks for your kindness and expertise in representing me. I am helping to win my next claim and lifted me up to me.

Thank you for your kind and covering, your a great person & Lawyer helped us when we needed help the most. I love you.

I can't hearing, but spoke to said it was for you to take the hearing. I would love to work with you.

Thank you for your support regarding the hospital bed, Mass Health.

Thank you for your support regarding the hospital bed, Mass Health.



# Dear Friends & Supporters,

The past year marked a special moment in our history as we celebrated CLA's 70th anniversary. It was cause for celebration as we reflected on the countless dedicated staff, donors, and community partners who have shaped the organization and enabled us to help thousands upon thousands of clients in Central and Western Massachusetts over the years. As you will see in the following pages, the anniversary also served as a stark reminder that there is still much to be done.

We are proud of our team's efforts to meet these challenges and all that the organization was able to achieve in 2021. We secured funding to bring on new housing advocates to help stem the wave of evictions and homelessness spawned by the pandemic. We hired education law attorneys to assist at-risk students and represented more workers laid off from their jobs. We obtained new funding to offer re-entry services to those in our community facing unjust barriers to success after incarceration. We established an innovative new family preservation project that supports families at risk of having their children removed from their homes by the state, which unfortunately continues to disproportionately affect families of color. We also expanded our housing discrimination advocacy to Hampden County, where housing segregation

persists. Finally, we deepened our commitment to supporting survivors of domestic violence, while our subsidiary, the Central West Justice Center, continued its work fighting for the rights of our immigrant neighbors.

None of these critical initiatives could have been achieved without the dedication of our staff, the generosity of our supporters, and the partnership of our communities.

Going forward, we will continue to be nimble as we respond to changing community needs. We will keep listening to our client communities and adapt to what they need us to do. We will also continue to do our best to expand our reach so that more people in need can access our services.

I am deeply grateful to the individuals who so many years ago had the foresight to take action to help us live up to the American ideal of justice for all, as well as the individuals and organizations that have supported our mission over the last seven decades. Thank you.



Sincerely,

Jonathan Mannina, Esq.  
Executive Director  
Community Legal Aid

## 2021 in Numbers



### CASES HANDLED

8,124

Total Cases impacting an estimated 20,000+ people

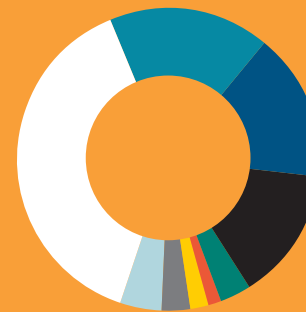
5,887

Total CLA cases

2,237

Total Central West Justice Center cases\*

### AREAS OF LAW



- 39% Housing and homelessness
- 17.5% Humanitarian-based immigration
- 16% Economic & food security (including unemployment benefits)
- 14% Assisting domestic violence survivors
- 3% Helping veterans
- 1.5% Keeping kids in school
- 2% Re-Entry after incarceration
- 3% Health (Medicaid, Medicare, long-term healthcare facilities)
- 4% Other

### POPULATION SERVED

#### INCOME

76% Up to 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines†

18% Between 125% and 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines†

6% Over 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines

#### LANGUAGE

30% Primary language other than English (over 30 languages)

#### AGE

20% 60 and older

74% 19-59 yrs

6% Under 19 yrs

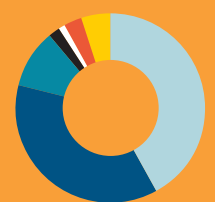
#### GENDER

68% Female identified

30% Male identified

2% Gender not identified

#### ETHNICITY

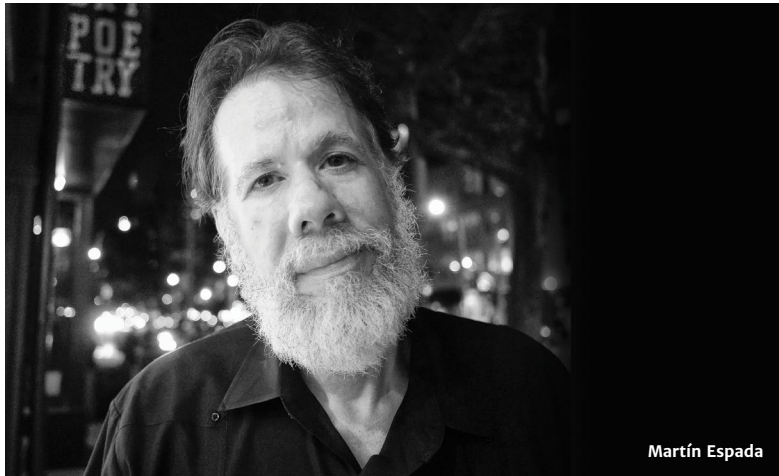


- 42% White
- 37% Hispanic
- 10% Black
- 2% Asian
- 1% Bi-racial or Multiracial
- 3% Other
- 5% Not disclosed

Federal Poverty Guidelines (2021)

† 125%: Pre-tax annual income of \$16,100 for an individual or \$33,125 for a family of four  
‡ 200%: Pre-tax annual income of \$25,760 for an individual or \$53,000 for a family of four

\* CLA's wholly-owned subsidiary, the Central West Justice Center (CWJC), receives no funding from the Legal Services Corporation.



Martín Espada



Attorney General Maura Healey

THANK YOU

Thank you to the law firms, bar associations, and businesses that generously supported Community Legal Aid's 70th Anniversary celebration as sponsors, helping to make the event an incredible success!

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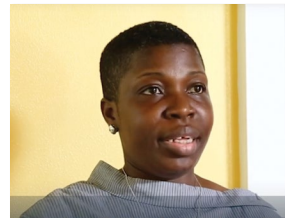
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70 Years Fighting for Justice

2021 marked 70 years in the fight to bring equal justice to our neighbors in Central and Western Massachusetts.

Community Legal Aid commemorated this anniversary with a special virtual event celebrating our achievements and showing appreciation for those who have supported CLA and its predecessor organizations. The event featured keynote remarks from Attorney General Maura Healey and a reading by poet Martín Espada, recent winner of the National Book Award. During the event, we heard from several of CLA's former clients, including Lois (pictured right). Lois needed help obtaining a guardianship for her mother who had developed Alzheimer's Disease.



"THEY WERE LIKE A FAMILY TO ME. THEY WERE ABLE TO GUIDE ME THROUGH EVERYTHING. I NEEDED THAT SUPPORT... FROM COMMUNITY LEGAL AID."

- LOIS



Scan the QR code to watch this memorable event, "70 Years of Fighting for Justice."

1951

1951 A group of attorneys from the Worcester County Bar Association files Articles of Organization creating the Legal Aid Society of Worcester, Inc., "to assist worthy persons, who are in need, to procure legal aid."

1957 - 1959

In 1957, the Legal Aid Society hires its first attorney-director, Ralph Sigel, & opens its first office. In 1959, the Legal Aid Society becomes a grantee of the local Community Chest (now the United Way of Central Mass.).

1964 - 1966

Congress passes the Economic Opportunity Act, providing federal funding for legal services & enabling the formation of Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS) in both Worcester & Springfield.

1967 - 1968

Neighborhood Legal Services of Springfield is incorporated "to provide legal counsel and representation for the poor in all civil and administrative matters." Neighborhood Legal Services of Worcester begins operating with its own board & director, and handles hundreds of cases each year.

1969

The Worcester County Bar Association creates its Lawyer Referral Service, with the Legal Aid Society designated as coordinator. It later becomes known as the Volunteer Lawyers Service.

1972

Western Mass. Legal Services (WMLS) is created to serve Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, & Hampshire counties, consolidating several local entities. NLS of Worcester changes its name to Worcester County Legal Services.

1974

Worcester County Legal Services becomes Central Mass. Legal Services (CMLS).

The Economic Opportunity Act expired in 1970. Despite opposition, Congress extends the act until a permanent Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is created in 1974.

1981 - 1982

When Congress slashes LSC's budget by 25%, CMLS is forced to cut its staff, close its Fitchburg office, & stop taking disability benefits cases. CMLS focuses on responding to emergencies & training community advocates.

1983

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) is created by the state legislature. In time, this entity becomes the primary funding source for LACCM & WMLS, with revenue coming from the state budget & the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program.

The Legal Aid Society of Worcester merges with Central Mass. Legal Services, creating the Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts (LACCM). LACCM assumes responsibility for the Volunteer Lawyers Service of the Worcester County Bar Association.

1996

Funded primarily by LSC, the Massachusetts Justice Project (MJP) is created & serves as the intake hotline for LACCM and WMLS. MJP also runs the Volunteer Lawyers Service, which allows for private lawyers to provide pro bono services.

2011

In the wake of the national housing market crash and recession of 2008, LACCM and WMLS merge under the name Community Legal Aid (CLA). The new combined organization provides free legal services to low-income and elderly residents in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire, Hampden, & Worcester counties.

2013 - 2014

CLA becomes an LSC grantee and incorporates a subsidiary, the Central West Justice Center (CWJC). CWJC's advocates focus on cases involving humanitarian-based immigration law, labor and employment rights, housing & homelessness issues, & access to public benefits. Unlike CLA, CWJC gets no funding from LSC.

2021

Building on a legacy that began seven decades ago, CLA and CWJC today provide free legal services to over 8,000 low-income and elderly households each year across the five counties of Central and Western Massachusetts, impacting an estimated 20,000 of the region's most vulnerable residents. No matter the name, the fight for justice continues for those who cannot afford legal assistance.

In a restructuring of legal services for the region, Massachusetts Justice Project becomes part of CLA. The merger streamlines intake for clients.

2021



Ms. Torres is a Board member of Community Legal Aid and a small business owner in Worcester County.

THANKS

WHEN DUA STOPPED MY UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS, I WAS UNDER EXTREME PRESSURE. THANKS TO COMMUNITY LEGAL AID FOR AIDING ME IN MY APPEAL FOR UNEMPLOYMENT. I TRULY BELIEVE IF I DIDN'T HAVE THE LEGAL ASSISTANCE OF ATTORNEY AMY DION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL AID, THEN I WOULD NOT HAVE WON MY APPEAL AND WOULD HAVE BEEN IN EVEN MORE FINANCIAL HARDSHIP.

- NATASHA TORRES

# Impact Litigation

Community Legal Aid is committed to using impact litigation strategies to magnify the force of our work. Impact litigation refers to cases that benefit a broader group of people than solely those involved in the lawsuit.

## PANDEMIC UNEMPLOYMENT

In 2021, Community Legal Aid's attorneys won an important victory for low-income workers across Massachusetts. In *Marrero et al. v. Jeffers*, Community Legal Aid represented several low-income employees in a case against the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA). CLA's clients were workers who had their hours reduced or were laid off due to the pandemic: a nurse, a nursing assistant, a machinist, a payroll professional, and a plant manager for a local food manufacturer. DUA had initially approved their claims and began paying them pandemic-related unemployment

benefits. But later, DUA suddenly stopped making payments and even demanded that some of the employees repay thousands of dollars. CLA believed that DUA's practices were unlawful and filed a motion for an injunction against the agency in Worcester Superior Court. The motion sought to require DUA to follow the agency's own rules with respect to the evaluation of workers' unemployment claims and to stop harmful practices the agency had adopted during the pandemic. **The Court agreed, and, as a result, DUA paid benefits to more than 20,000 workers across the state whose claims had been on hold.**



Hampden County Client Jorge Ortiz-Vazquez

## JUDGED ON MERIT

In another powerful impact case, CLA Attorney Uri Strauss won an important victory for Massachusetts tenants in *Morse v. Ortiz-Vazquez*. In this case, the Mass. Appeals Court ruled that the Housing Court was wrong to preclude a tenant from filing a late answer to an eviction complaint, thereby barring the tenant from raising affirmative defenses that could have preserved his tenancy. The tenant, Jorge Ortiz-Vazquez, a native Spanish speaker, had not filed a timely answer because his language barrier made it hard to understand what he needed to do. When he appeared for the trial, Jorge stated that he had evidence to prove that his apartment contained defective conditions, a claim which could have enabled him to win the eviction case.

According to Attorney Strauss, "In summary process [eviction] actions, the vast majority of tenants do not have a lawyer because they cannot afford one. These cases also move quickly and are governed by a complex web of procedural and substantive laws. Not surprisingly, most tenants find themselves unable to file a timely answer."

Attorney Strauss continued, "In this case, when the Housing Court refused to let Mr. Ortiz-Vazquez file a late answer, it meant that he could not present a defense to his eviction, specifically, that he was lawfully withholding rent due to bad conditions in the apartment.

**'With this ruling, Mr. Ortiz-Vazquez and tenants like him will be permitted to proceed on the merits of their defenses, rather than possibly becoming homeless because of a missed deadline.'**

## CLIENT CASE

## Jonathan's Story



**Staff Attorney  
Alyssa Golden**

Attorney Golden's work as a CORI/Re-entry Staff Attorney is possible thanks to a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. CLA is a partner in the Improving Housing to Improve Health Project administered by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments. CLA's role is to improve access to affordable housing and employment for people with substance use disorder and/or criminal records in Franklin County and the North Quabbin region.

**W**hen Jonathan Olan first contacted CLA Staff Attorney Alyssa Golden, he worked for an organization providing post-incarceration job training and employment opportunities and wanted to discuss ways to connect people with resources offered by his agency and CLA.

While speaking to Attorney Golden, Jonathan disclosed he had a criminal record that posed many barriers in his own life. Jonathan was incarcerated for a period of time because of drug-related convictions. Not only did he face obstacles because of his convictions, but upon Jonathan's release he had no job history. Jonathan began considering a career and realized his own experiences provide invaluable insight into how to help people living with substance use disorder navigate the myriad barriers posed by criminal records.

He proceeded to graduate from Westfield State University with a certification in addiction counseling.

Attorney Golden worked with Jonathan to assess his options and ultimately sealed every conviction on his record. She said, "Criminal records follow people around long after their interactions with the criminal court system have ended. CORI sealing is a powerful tool because it drastically decreases the number of entities who can access those records. It can significantly increase people's options for accessing safe, affordable housing and pursuing steady employment."

The knowledge that his criminal record has been sealed has positively impacted Jonathan's view of the future. "Before meeting Alyssa, I felt hopeless. I felt so anxious about reaching out for help for myself, but she was so understanding and compassionate. I had never been the type of person to ask for help. I hadn't considered that this could be an option, never mind something I could get help with for free. She saved my life."

◀ Franklin County Client  
Jonathan Olan

## CORI/RE-ENTRY

### Offering Second Chances

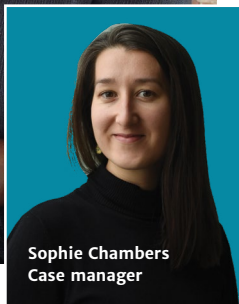
Criminal records (known in Massachusetts as Criminal Offender Record Information, or "CORI") can make it hard to find a job or housing and to successfully rejoin society. Helping formerly incarcerated people re-enter society and attain steady work and safe housing is an essential first step in enabling them to live safe, stable, and productive lives. CLA's ability to effectively address these problems goes to the very core of the American belief in offering second chances.

# New Initiatives

Community Legal Aid appreciates the generosity of its many community partners, donors, and funders who supported new initiatives and the expansion of its services.



Madeline Weaver Blanchette  
Senior Supervising Attorney



Sophie Chambers  
Case manager

are just manifestations of poverty,” said Madeline Weaver Blanchette, the project’s Senior Supervising Attorney.

The needs of families served by this project align with CLA’s areas of expertise, including accessing public benefits, preventing eviction, obtaining assistance with abuse prevention orders, and advocating for educational services for a child with special needs.

The project was funded with a grant from the Court Improvement Program, an initiative administered by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court aimed at improving outcomes for children in the child welfare system. In addition to Attorney Blanchette, the project’s team includes case manager Sophie Chambers and parent advocate Amanda Echeverri.

The Family Stabilization Project is based in Hampden County and will serve as a model for similar services across the state.

## FAMILY STABILIZATION PROJECT

**I**n 2021, CLA launched the Family Stabilization Project. The first of its kind in Massachusetts and one of only a handful of similar programs across the country, the project provides legal support to families who are involved with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The goal is to prevent a child’s unnecessary removal from their home and the accompanying trauma that can result.

“The vast majority of the cases with DCF are neglect cases, but many of those circumstances

“The vast majority of the cases with DCF are neglect cases, but many of those circumstances are just manifestations of poverty.”

Madeline Weaver Blanchette  
Senior Supervising Attorney

## BERKSHIRE LEGAL RE-ENTRY PROJECT

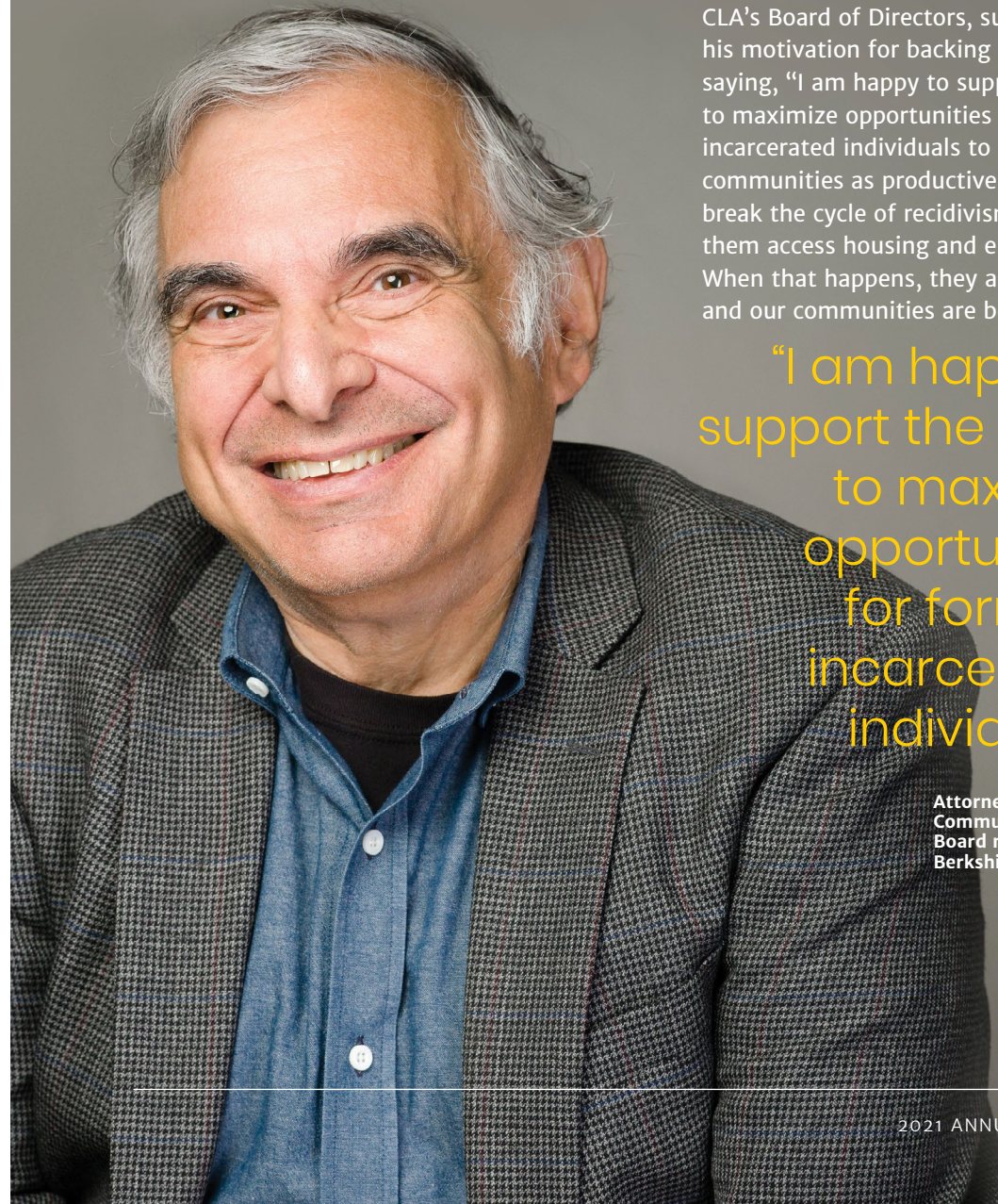
Some of Community Legal Aid’s most effective advocacy has its roots in local community initiatives. This was the case in Berkshire County where Pittsfield Attorney Mark S. Gold and the Black Rock Foundation, led by local philanthropist Robin McGraw, teamed up to fund the Berkshire Legal Re-Entry Project. The new program, led by CLA Attorney Annie Maurer, provides legal assistance with housing and employment matters to Berkshire County residents who have been incarcerated, have prior justice system involvement, or have substance use disorder.

CLA’s Berkshire County Managing Attorney Jennifer Dieringer explained the critical need for this work, saying, “When individuals are released from the Berkshire County House of Corrections, their ability to access safe and affordable housing and find stable employment is absolutely critical to their successful re-entry into society. Yet they face particularly challenging barriers to stability due to their history. Helping formerly incarcerated individuals gain employment and secure housing gives them a better chance of successfully re-integrating into society and reaching their goals.”

Attorney Gold, who also serves on CLA’s Board of Directors, summarized his motivation for backing the project by saying, “I am happy to support the effort to maximize opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals to re-enter their communities as productive citizens and break the cycle of recidivism by helping them access housing and employment. When that happens, they are better off, and our communities are better off.”

“I am happy to support the effort to maximize opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals.”

Attorney Mark Gold,  
Community Legal Aid  
Board member from  
Berkshire County



# Central West Justice Center

AN AFFILIATE OF COMMUNITY LEGAL AID

The Central West Justice Center, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Community Legal Aid, focuses on cases involving:

- employment rights
- housing and homelessness issues
- access to public benefits
- humanitarian-based immigration law

CWJC's Immigration Unit helps individuals applying for humanitarian immigration relief, including:

- VAWA petitions for survivors of domestic violence
- U visas for crime victims
- T visas for trafficking victims
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status applications for abused, neglected, or abandoned children
- Asylum for individuals seeking protection from persecution in their home countries
- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) cases for "Dreamers"

CWJC also houses the **Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Project**, a state-wide program that provides services to the state's low-income agricultural workers and other migrant laborers.

*CWJC receives no funding from the Legal Services Corporation.*



**TEEN ARTIST DIEGO V.** is the child of migrant workers in Massachusetts. A spectacular artist, Diego created this artwork to promote the Fairness for Farmworkers Act, which, if passed, for the first time would entitle migrant and seasonal farmworkers working in Massachusetts to earn the state minimum wage and eradicate the agricultural subminimum wage of \$8.00 an hour. It would also mandate overtime pay for more than 55 hours worked and a day of rest. CWJC is part of the Fairness for Farmworkers coalition.





Franklin County client Isidro with his family

I'M FROM EL SALVADOR AND I HAD A VERY COMPLEX IMMIGRATION CASE. BEING A FARM WORKER, I WAS WORRIED ABOUT FINDING A LAWYER THAT I COULD AFFORD. I CONTACTED CWJC AND THANKS TO THEM I AM NOW A LEGAL RESIDENT. I WAS ABLE TO REUNITE WITH MY FAMILY, WITH MY CHILDREN, THANKS TO THEM. I AM VERY GRATEFUL."

- ISIDRO, CLIENT + MIGRANT FARMWORKER

## In her own words

A client of Staff Attorney Donna Morelli tells the story of how CWJC changed her life.

“ I am 27 years old, and I come from the Dominican Republic. I reached out to the Central West Justice Center because I needed help with my immigration status after my husband became emotionally abusive toward me.

When I first met “Luis,” I was crazy in love with him. I was still living in the Dominican Republic, and Luis was an American of Dominican descent. Luis and I did everything together – shopping, restaurants, and vacations at the beach. We talked about our goals for the future and wanted to start a family together. My own family liked Luis also, and in 2014 we were married in a beautiful wedding attended by both of our families. Eventually, we moved to the U.S.

A few months after our marriage Luis’s behavior began to change. He became possessive and controlling and became jealous if I spoke to anyone else. I ended my friendships in order to keep the peace with him. Luis also refused to allow me to work or go to school. When he was at work, he would call me all day long to make sure I was still at home. I became depressed and

nervous and felt completely isolated. I broke out in terrible rashes due to the stress.

After years of enduring his abuse, I was eventually divorced from Luis. But now I was afraid I would lose my lawful immigration status because it was based on my marriage to Luis. I feared I would be deported.

I reached out to the Central West Justice Center for help. Attorney Donna Morelli accepted my case and represented me in applying for a waiver of the requirement that married couples be interviewed together. My Lawful Permanent Residency was successfully extended, and I’m now eligible to apply for citizenship. I am grateful to Attorney Morelli and the Central West Justice Center for taking my case when I desperately needed help after the end of my abusive marriage.



### CLIENT CASE

## Application for Asylum

“Marco” came to the Central West Justice Center for help seeking asylum in the United States. Born in Kingston, Jamaica, he was abandoned by his mother as an infant. Marco lived with his father, who was physically and mentally abusive.

After high school, Marco started working and began a relationship with a man. When his father found out about the relationship, he threatened Marco and ousted him to their community. Afraid for his life, Marco fled Kingston and became homeless. In addition to these hardships, this was also a very dangerous time for Marco’s personal safety, as he was attacked and threatened multiple times by police, security guards, and others in his community. For years, Marco was unable to find stable housing because of how severely gay men and LGBTQ people are stigmatized in Jamaica. He lived his life in fear of being outed, attacked, or killed. He said, “During my whole life in Jamaica, I never felt safe there as a man who is attracted to men.”

In 2017, after years of feeling at risk of being outed and terrified of further violent attacks, Marco traveled to Massachusetts to attend an AIDS conference. Feeling a sense of safety for the first time in many years, Marco began the process to apply for asylum so that he could remain in the United States. CWJC Staff Attorney Kelly Morgan worked with Marco to obtain asylum and is now helping him to get his green card.

After settling in Worcester, Marco was granted a work permit. He was then able to rent an apartment and pay his own bills. He also sought medical attention for his physical and emotional health. Marco hopes to go to culinary school and to open his own restaurant serving Jamaican food some day.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHUTTERSTOCK



# Pro Bono Programs

Community Legal Aid's pro bono programs greatly enhance our ability to provide access to justice for our clients. We refer hundreds of cases a year to attorneys working in private practice, corporations, and government. CLA Pro Bono deeply appreciates the skill and commitment to justice that pro bono attorneys bring to our programs.

## PRO BONO HONOR ROLL

CLA appreciates the pro bono attorneys who handled cases for our programs in FY 2021.

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**Abra C. Allexenberg**  
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 Laura F. Arbeitman  
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 Brynn S. Zawada  
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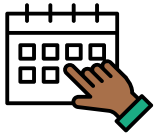
*Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) volunteers are bolded*





FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Meredith Palmer  
Pro Bono Director  
mpalmer@cla-ma.org



View pro bono calendar and available cases with QR code:



# Pro Bono Spotlight

As part of our “70 Years Fighting for Justice” anniversary event, we presented CLA’s 70th Anniversary Pro Bono Award to two outstanding volunteer attorneys: **Rhonda Bachrach** of Worcester and **Mary Samberg** of West Springfield.



**ATTORNEY SAMBERG** was honored as one of our longest-serving volunteers, joining the legal services pro bono panel in 1993

representing low-income clients in the area of family law. Since 2014, she has assisted with over 60 conciliation and limited assistance representation cases.



Pro bono work has been important to me since I started practicing. At the time, it seemed like the right thing to do. In court, I saw a lot of people who needed representation but could not afford an attorney. These are the people who really need someone to step in for them. I think it is important to carve out a part of your practice with pro bono work, and I have made it a habit to have at least one pro bono conciliation case each month. It is very rewarding when people say, Thank you for being my voice.

ATTORNEY MARY SAMBERG



**ATTORNEY BACHRACH** was honored as she regularly finds the time to volunteer for our Lawyer for the Day Programs, in addition to taking

on full representation cases in the areas of bankruptcy and family law. Since 2018, Attorney Bachrach individually donated over 250 hours of pro bono service.



I love working as a pro bono attorney with Community Legal Aid. It is the most rewarding work. At any courthouse you will see people who are destitute, and simply cannot fight for themselves in our legal system. These cases are dealing with people’s families, their children, their homes, bankruptcies, abuse. When you see people at their most vulnerable state who just do not know where to turn, there is no better feeling than being able to say, I can help you with that.

ATTORNEY RHONDA BACHRACH



CLIENT CASE

## Tony's Story

**A**ntonio Rivera, who goes by “Tony,” was referred to Community Legal Aid through our Worcester **Medical-Legal Partnership\*** with UMass Memorial Health.

Tony worked for many years in maintenance and custodial jobs. Now in his 60’s, he suffered back injuries two decades ago that, in addition to his other health issues, severely limit his mobility. Tony is unable to sit, stand, or walk for long periods of time. His only income is from a modest monthly disability benefit. For 16 years, Tony lived in a small basement apartment in Worcester, which still cost almost half of his monthly income. In Fall of 2020, as the pandemic raged, an investor bought his apartment building and immediately raised all the rents. Tony could not pay the increased rent, so the new owner filed an eviction case against him.

While CLA Staff Attorney Mariyam Bhatti worked on Tony’s eviction case, Tony received a letter informing him that his application for subsidized housing was denied because of a criminal record from 20 years ago. After months of advocacy by CLA Staff Attorney Nina Harrison to help Tony seal this decades-old criminal record, his denial was overturned, and Tony was approved for subsidized housing. With CLA’s help, he was able to move into accessible public housing. Soon after moving into his new apartment, Tony began treatment for cancer, and his safe, accessible apartment, provided a far more comfortable place for him to live out his final days.

“I had nowhere else to go. Without CLA, I would have been on the street, living in my car.”



**A Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP)** is an innovative collaboration between the medical and legal communities. In the MLP model, medical providers are trained to spot potential cases where a patient’s medical issues may be improved by legal advocacy. In the last year, providers at UMass Memorial Health in Worcester referred 190 patients to CLA through our MLP collaboration.



Worcester County Client Tony Rivera and Staff Attorney Mariyam Bhatti. Tony passed away shortly before this report was published.

## Dear Friends,

As President of the Board of Directors of Community Legal Aid, I am incredibly proud to be a part of a community that has supported legal services for our low-income and elderly neighbors over the last seven decades.

Throughout this report, the voices of some of Community Legal Aid's former clients remind us of the transformational impact Community Legal Aid can have on the lives of those we serve.

Now multiply just one of those voices by 8,000 and you get a sense of the impact Community Legal Aid has made in our community over the past year.

By coming together as a community we are supporting each other in ways that make a real difference. We are working together so that no family becomes homeless, no child goes hungry, and no abuse survivor stands alone. We are working together to ensure that every child gets an education, every elder lives with dignity, and every veteran is supported. Our incredible staff is fighting every day to close the "justice gap" and to secure life's necessities for those most in need.

We are grateful to all of the donors and funders listed in this report for coming together as a community to continue the fight for justice for all of the low-income and elderly residents of Central and Western Massachusetts. Thank you.



Sincerely,

Todd Rodman  
President, Community Legal Aid  
Board of Directors

## Access to Justice Campaign

Every year, Community Legal Aid relies on the help of attorneys throughout Central and Western Massachusetts as they ask their colleagues, law firms, and peers to support our work. Our fiscal year 2021 Access to Justice Campaign, which began on October 1, 2020 and ran through the spring of 2021, raised over \$140,000 from over 400 individuals, law firms, and other businesses. We are so grateful for our committee chairs and committee members who helped with this campaign. Thank you!

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## ENSURING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

In Hampden County, public school students experience suspension and dropout rates at double the state's average. Recognizing the gravity of this issue, the Barr Foundation awarded a grant to Community Legal Aid to enable it to expand its Education Law services in Hampden County. The multi-year grant allowed CLA to hire a new staff attorney to assist low-income families with issues related to their children's education, including stressors related to COVID and the resulting toggle between remote, in-person, and hybrid learning. The Foundation's generosity will help ensure that Hampden County's at-risk students, who are often burdened by poverty, limited English proficiency, and lack of technology, have the opportunity to successfully remain in school.

"The Barr Foundation believes every young person can graduate high school prepared to be successful in college, career, and life," said Kate Dobin, Barr Foundation's Senior Program Officer - Education. "But we know that today, not every student receives

the necessary supports to meet their educational needs in pursuit of that vision. Community Legal Aid plays a critical role, working in partnership with students, families, and schools, to ensure students get the help they need. We look forward to learning alongside Community Legal Aid as they grow their work in Hampden County."

**Suspension and dropout rates are double the state's average in Hampden County.**



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Attorney J. Kendall (“Jay”) Huber has been a donor, volunteer, and member of CLA’s Board of Directors for over a decade. As the retired General Counsel and Executive Vice President of The Hanover Insurance Group, Inc. now prepares to retire from Community Legal Aid’s board in 2022, we want to express our sincere thanks for his many years of loyal service and generosity.

Jay said, “At the suggestion of a friend and mentor, I participated in the very first annual Access to Justice campaign 14 years ago, and every year since then.”

He continued, “Over the years, I developed a deep respect for the dedication and care CLA personnel have for the clients they represent. The bulk of my career has been in business law, which pales against the needs of families seeking housing, mothers seeking safe shelters for their children, veterans needing benefits, moms and dads needing to secure health care and education for their children. These are the gritty issues CLA deals with every day. The help CLA provides to these people is profound.”

If you are interested in learning more about making a gift to Community Legal Aid, please contact Tom Navin at 413.727.7115.

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The 2021 Community Report recognizes donations made between October 1, 2020, and September 30, 2021. If you think your name should have been included, please contact CLA's Development Department at: 413-727-7115 or donorrelations@cla-ma.org.

*The asterisk (\*) indicates members of our Loyalty to Justice Circle, which celebrates and recognizes donors who have made five or more gifts in support of our work.*

*(†) recognizes deceased supporters of our work.*

# Commemorative Gifts

We are grateful when our supporters make a gift to Community Legal Aid as a tribute to a family member, friend, or colleague.

## GIFTS IN HONOR

**In Honor of Peter Benjamin, Ines Diaz-Rodriguez, Jennifer Dieringer, Susan Edelstein, Carmen Gonzalez, Mildred Otero and Faye Rachlin**  
Wendy Kaplan Miller and Andy Miller

**In Honor of David Seltz and Coleen Elstermeyer**  
Sasha Hayes-Rusnov

**In Honor of Gabriel Otero & Ann Cascanett**  
Gertrude Robert

**In Honor of Stephen Ansolabehere**  
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**In Honor of Peter Benjamin**  
Ofar and Rhoda Ben-Gai

**In Honor of Janice Cook**  
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**In Honor of Julie Dick**  
Floretta Deboise

**In Honor of Gabriel Fonseca**  
Carolyn Gilbert

**In Honor of Rosemarie Freeland**  
Emilie Costello  
Monica Freeland  
Jem Hernandez  
Devon Hickey  
David Hurton  
Eileen Moore  
Liz Recko-Morrison  
Kiersten Regelin  
Jaimie Steinher  
Anne Wiley

**In Honor of Mary Goodhines**  
James Goodhines

**In Honor of Gloria Herbst**  
Phyllis Hanlon

**In Honor of Catherine Kay**  
Sarah Mager

**In Honor of Mary Keefe and Frank Kartheiser**  
Douglas Botelho

**In Honor of Peter Klein**  
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**In Honor of Michele Kunitz**  
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**In Honor of Carrie Love**  
Carrie Greene

**In Honor of Don Mahan**  
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**In Honor of Jonathan Mannina**  
Hon. Edward Ginsburg (Ret.)

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James and Elaine Tourtelotte

**In Honor of Bruce McAmis**  
Frances Van Treese

**In Honor of Cory Mescon**  
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**In Honor of Doris Metzger**  
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**In Honor of Blanca Miller**  
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**In Honor of Patti Prunhuber**  
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**In Honor of Faye Rachlin**  
Sally Gottesman

**In Honor of Dianne Sandman**  
Anonymous

**In Honor of Maureen St. Cyr**  
Susan Stefan

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Mary Vaskas

**In Honor of Pat Walsh Ollari**  
James Gregory

## GIFTS IN MEMORIUM

**In Memory of Gregory Angelini**  
Edward McIntyre  
Christopher Mehne

**In Memory of Alan M. Barron**  
Shelley Barron

**In Memory of Ernest Chase**  
David Katz

**In Memory of Herb Epstein**  
Valerie Fisk

**In Memory of Lynn and Linwood Fisk**  
Valerie Fisk

**In Memory of Nason A. Hurowitz**  
Hon. Martha Grace (Ret.)

**In Memory of Paul Kalill**  
Jeffrey Sagalyn  
Amy Bricker

**In Memory of Walter Krzewicki**  
Paul Kreswick

**In Memory of Luca Lincoln Gibson in furthering support toward non-binary gender inclusion**  
Anna Phillips

**In Memory of Jeffrey Luekens**  
Michael and Elizabeth Luekens

**In Memory of Milton Pravitz**  
Laura Pravitz and Seymour Rosen

**In Memory of Dorothy M. Owen**  
Patricia Owen

**In Memory of Hon. James F. Queenan**  
Denise Pappalardo

**In Memory of Sumner Silver**  
David Talman

**In Memory of Virginia Stanton Smith**  
Andrew Hochberg



Members of the CLA and CWJC boards at the 2021 summer meeting.

# Our Team

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(as of September 30, 2021)

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Denisse Verdiguél  
Client Representative

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Massachusetts District Court

*We appreciate our board members' outstanding dedication to Community Legal Aid and the clients we serve.*



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(as of September 30, 2021)

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|   | Meredith Palmer         |                      |
|   | Christina Paradiso      |                      |

**AmeriCorps:**  
**Isaac Price-Slade**  
**LeAnne Drum**  
**Aiyana Smith**  
**Taylor Kitchen**

**COUNTING MILESTONES**


Congratulations to staff members who celebrated major milestones in their legal aid careers in 2021:

**15**  
 Christina Paradiso  
 Francisca Reyes

**20**  
 Marion Hohn

**30**  
 Ray Mestre

**35+**  
 Carmen Gonzalez (left)  
 Blanca Miller (right)



## RETIREMENTS

Over the past year, three of our longest-serving employees retired from Community Legal Aid. With a combined total of over 120 years of service in legal aid, these three outstanding advocates helped thousands of individuals in dire need of assistance with the most fundamental of needs, including housing stability, food security, and safety from abuse and exploitation. Community Legal Aid is deeply grateful for their commitment to serving our clients and wishes them well in retirement.



**Peter Benjamin** joined Western Mass. Legal Services in 1979 and, except for a brief foray into private practice, spent the rest of his career working at legal aid, as a Staff Attorney, Managing Attorney, Litigation Director, and then Advocacy Coordinator. Peter specialized in elder, employment, and housing law. He was a wise and supportive mentor and supervisor to many at CLA.



**Dianne Sandman** retired as the Senior Elder Law Paralegal after serving elders and disabled individuals at CLA and one of our predecessor agencies, the Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts, since 1981. Over her 40-year tenure, Dianne earned a well-deserved reputation as a fiercely devoted and skilled advocate for her elderly clients.



**Jan Stiefel** served as a legal aid attorney for her entire distinguished career. She joined Western Mass. Legal Services in 1987, focusing on housing and Medicare. Later she became a local and statewide leader in elder law, retiring as CLA's Senior Supervising Attorney of the Elder Law unit. She was a kind and compassionate supervisor and mentor to many advocates.

## CWJC Team

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 Badger Legal Group, Westborough

**Charles R. Casartello Jr., Esq.**  
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CWJC receives no funding from the Legal Services Corporation.

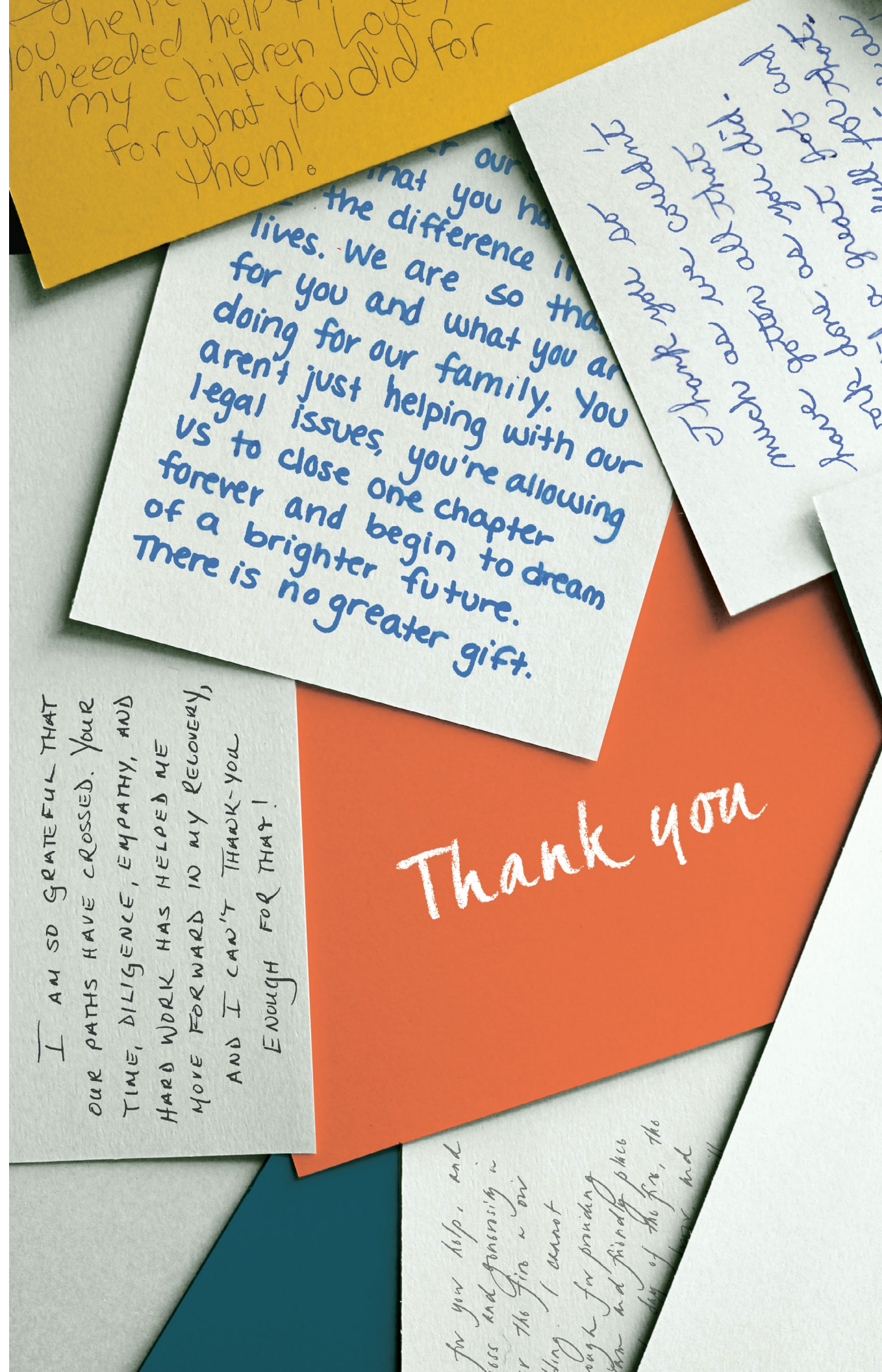
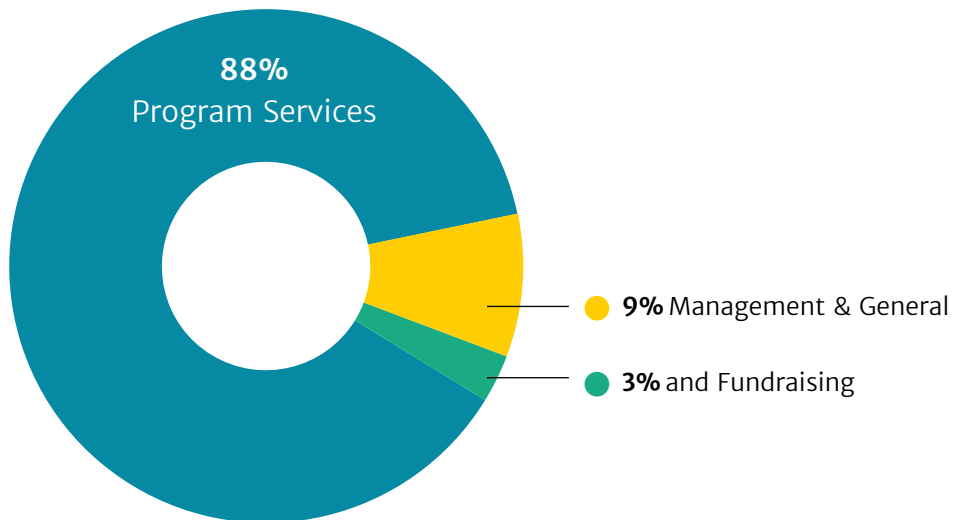
# Financials

Community Legal Aid and Affiliate Statement of Activities for the Twelve Months Ending September 30, 2021.

## REVENUE

Federal Government Grants	\$3,663,200
State & Local	\$9,763,589
Foundation Grants	\$795,677
Private Fundraising	\$241,606
United Way Grants	\$144,519
Attorneys' Fees	\$93,307
Paycheck Protection Program Loan	\$1,611,000
Other Income	\$299,097
<b>Revenue Before Donated Services</b>	<b>\$16,611,995</b>
<b>Donated Services - Attorneys</b>	<b>\$530,399</b>
<b>Total Revenue After Donated Services</b>	<b>\$17,142,394</b>

## ALLOCATION OF EXPENSES





Community Legal Aid  
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Worcester, MA 01608

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# Help fight for Justice

Community Legal Aid works to improve the lives of low-income and elderly people through legal assistance that protects fundamental rights, secures access to basic needs, and challenges policies and practices that harm our clients. We work to assure fairness for all in the justice system, protecting homes, livelihoods, health, and families.



### GIVE ONLINE:

Scan to help Community Legal Aid continue to thrive by making a tax-deductible gift today.

[communitylegal.org/donate](http://communitylegal.org/donate)

### GIVE BY PHONE:

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(508) 425-2805

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Fitchburg, MA 01420

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20 Hampton Avenue  
Northampton, MA 01060

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Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Springfield, MA 01144

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