Dear Friends & Supporters,

As I reflect on 2023, I am extremely proud of the profound impact that Community Legal Aid’s dedicated attorneys, paralegals, case managers, support staff, and pro bono volunteers have had on the lives of the thousands of low-income and elderly people we served in Central and Western Massachusetts.

The past year had its share of challenges. The public at large frequently heard talk about the housing crisis and about the plight of newcomers arriving in our region. While many of us watched these events unfold from a distance, Community Legal Aid and our subsidiary, the Central West Justice Center, were on the front lines, meeting with clients and hearing story after story of individual hardship. Our advocates were deeply involved in the efforts to support new arrivals and those affected by the housing crisis, and many others facing a variety of critical legal issues.

While representing individual clients lies at the heart of our work, we are also proud of the advocacy efforts which had a broader impact in our communities. You will read in this report about cases that not only served our immediate clients but also addressed policies and practices that affected many more people. Through our broad-reaching advocacy efforts, we are working to dismantle systemic barriers and ensure that our clients—and those in similar situations—have fair access to resources and opportunities.

In my 25 years in legal aid, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of legal advocacy for many of our most vulnerable neighbors and have seen how far-reaching its impact can be. As Robert F. Kennedy said, “Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, [they] send forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Together with the support of our funders, donors, partners, and volunteers, we will continue standing up for our low-income and elderly neighbors—sending forth ripples of justice to the thousands of clients whom we serve.

Thank you for your continued support and for being a part of the fight for justice for all.

With deep appreciation,

Jonathan Mannina, Esq.
Executive Director, Community Legal Aid, Inc.
Matthew’s Story

Last winter, CLA Staff Attorney Molly Jane Thoms led a training for staff from the Brien Center, a non-profit social services organization in the Berkshires. The next day, Attorney Thoms received a call from one of the Brien Center’s caseworkers and heard about Matthew for the first time.

Matthew was thirteen and had lived in Berkshire County his whole life. Over five years ago, his public school district placed Matthew at a private special education school due to his social and emotional needs. While he originally thrived in this program, something changed in the fall of 2022. His grandmother and legal guardian, Deanna, started getting calls from the school saying his behavior was uncontrollable and she had to come pick him up. Matthew was even suspended a few times. In February 2023, with no process or warning, the school informed Deanna and the district that he was not allowed to return.

Fortunately, Matthew started at a new school the following month. Since then, he has been making remarkable progress. But his family wasn’t ready to turn their back on his challenging experiences. In particular, Matthew continued to express concerns about friends who still attended his former school.

In investigating the situation, Attorney Thoms discovered that personnel at his former school had physically restrained Matthew on a regular basis. His family had not been notified about most of the restraints, in violation of numerous state regulations. The school had also violated his procedural rights related to school discipline and termination of placement.

With Attorney Thoms assisting her, Deanna decided to file a complaint with the state education agency, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The school was unable to refute any facts the complaint alleged. The case was ultimately resolved through an agreement between the family and the school that achieved Deanna’s two primary goals: to bring attention to Matthew’s experience at the school and ensure increased oversight of this school by the Office of Approved Special Education Schools, which is a branch of DESE.

Throughout the process, Attorney Thoms’ advocacy was fueled by Deanna’s desire to ensure other students would not experience what Matthew did. Deanna feels strongly that schools responsible for educating vulnerable children like Matthew must remain transparent and accountable to the communities they serve.
Employment Unit

CLA’s Advocacy Helps Thousands of Workers

Last year, CLA settled a pandemic-era lawsuit against the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA), the state agency that administers unemployment insurance benefits in Massachusetts.

In the case, Marrero et al. v. Jeffers, CLA represented five low-income workers who lost their jobs in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Initially, DUA approved the workers’ unemployment insurance (UI) claims and began paying them weekly benefits. But later, DUA claimed it was “overwhelmed” by the number of pandemic-driven UI claims. So, without notice, DUA suddenly “held,” and stopped paying them weekly benefits. DUA even demanded that some workers repay thousands of dollars in benefits that they had already spent on rent, food, and other necessities.

This left workers in an untenable state of limbo: they could not appeal, because their claims remained officially “approved,” but DUA had stopped paying their weekly benefits.

CLA’s clients were not alone. DUA had placed thousands of workers’ UI claims on hold, which left numerous Massachusetts families without resources to pay bills and buy food.

In late 2020, CLA sued DUA in Worcester Superior Court. In March 2021, CLA obtained a preliminary injunction that ordered DUA to resume paying weekly benefits, providing CLA’s clients, along with thousands of other unemployed workers state-wide, with the benefits they desperately needed during the height of the pandemic.

Due to CLA’s victory in obtaining the preliminary injunction, DUA agreed to settle the remainder of the case. Under the settlement, DUA promulgated new regulations (430 CMR 11.00) that preserve policy and system changes made based on the preliminary injunction. DUA also agreed to pay $50,000 to compensate CLA for its attorneys’ work on the Marrero case.

CLA’s victory in this case reaffirms that DUA—and other government agencies—exist to help the people of the Commonwealth. So, when people need that help, it is absolutely unlawful for a state agency to halt benefits or services, claiming that the need is too great or the problem too big. The Constitution and other laws continue to apply during times of crisis. That is the lesson of this victory.”

—ATTORNEY LEIGH WOODRUFF, CLA’s Litigation Director

CLA’s clients explain the hardships that they and their family members suffered because of the DUA’s actions.

Jefrie worked as a machine operator, assembler, and maintenance crew member. Deprived of UI benefits, Jefrie fell behind on rent, child support and other bills, which caused him and his family to incur substantial credit card debt. He and his partner incurred fees for late auto loan and insurance payments, damaging their credit scores.

“During the time period [without my UI benefits] ... my family and I were under great stress and anxiety. I personally suffered depression, emotional distress, and deep concern for my family’s future and well-being.”

Cassandra, a single mother and the sole caretaker for her eight-year-old daughter, worked as a registered nurse. When the DUA stopped paying her weekly benefits, she was unable to make payments for her rent, car, internet service and electricity, which cut her daughter off from attending school remotely. She worried her credit would be destroyed.

“My quality of life has dramatically declined as a result of not receiving these benefits. It has affected my mental, physical, and emotional well-being. [It] has driven me to the brink of poverty, and has caused me emotional and financial harm that will take years, if ever, to recover from.”

“Amy’s credit would be destroyed. My child’s education was in peril. My entire life was falling apart.”

Allyson has worked in Massachusetts for 35 years, most recently in payroll. To make ends meet, Allyson had to go on food stamps, cash out her 401k, and max out her credit cards. She also fell behind in rent and had to borrow money from her children, which caused her shame and embarrassment.

“My quality of life has dramatically declined as a result of not receiving these benefits. It has affected my mental, physical, and emotional well-being. [It] has driven me to the brink of poverty, and has caused me emotional and financial harm that will take years, if ever, to recover from.”

“I am worried my child and I may end up homeless, without my car or credit intact. I am worried that everything I have worked so hard to accomplish and to build is falling apart.

“The magnitude of the stress is hard to even communicate. It pervades every facet of my life. It is affecting my relationships, my parenting, and my physical and mental well-being.”
Making a Broader Impact with Appellate Litigation

Community Legal Aid is committed to working on cases that benefit a broad group of people who face common issues. By doing so, we magnify the impact of our work.

In 2023, CLA won important victories in two appellate cases that provide significant protections for tenants and domestic violence survivors in our communities. By successfully arguing the cases at the appellate level, CLA helped tenants and survivors across the state.

In the case of Quilla Q. v. Matt M., 102 Mass. App. Ct. 244 (2023), CLA helped ensure that courts provide domestic violence survivors with all the relief that they are seeking and are entitled to under the law.

CLA’s client, Quilla,* requested child support at an abuse prevention order hearing in the District Court. Like many survivors of domestic violence, Quilla needed immediate financial support to allow her to escape the abuse. However, the judge told her to make the request for child support in the Probate and Family Court instead, causing months of delay before the support could begin. On appeal, CLA Senior Supervising Attorney Christina Paradiso argued that the law requires that judges must, when requested, consider child support as part of an abuse prevention order under Mass. General Law Chapter 209A.

The Massachusetts Appeals Court agreed that the request for child support should have been considered at the time the District Court extended the abuse prevention order. “Referring a plaintiff to another court may discourage the person from seeking the relief to which they are entitled under the law and may expose the person to additional danger,” the Court stated.

The decision provides clarity and a reminder that achieving physical safety often requires economic independence.

In Ferreira v. Charland, 103 Mass. App. Ct. 194 (2023), CLA Staff Attorney Gabriel Fonseca not only helped a client avoid eviction, but also won an appellate decision reinforcing the Legislature’s efforts to provide strong statutory protections to tenants in Massachusetts.

CLA represented a tenant, Laural Charland, in a no-fault eviction. The main issue in the case was whether the landlord’s payment of money to remedy a violation of law meant that the tenant could no longer pursue a defense under Mass. General Law Chapter 239, §8A to stay in the rental unit.

In ruling that such a payment would not wipe out the tenant’s defense, the majority of the Massachusetts Appeals Court noted that a contrary ruling “would be undermining the Legislature’s efforts to strengthen a tenant’s right to avoid eviction.”

“‘This decision did not change the statute; it simply enforced [the law] as written and intended by the Massachusetts Legislature. Tenants have legal rights and protections, too, and the Appeals Court simply reaffirmed and enforced one of those existing protections.’

—ATTORNEY GABRIEL FONSECA

Ferreira was also the Appeals Court’s first en banc decision under a pilot program launched in the fall of 2022. Under the program, a judge may call for a case to be heard en banc (by the full Appeals Court of 25 justices) if the proceeding involves one or more questions of “exceptional importance.” The Ferreira case was originally argued to a three-judge Appeals Court panel, and then reheard by the full bench of the Appeals Court.

“I am writing to say Gabriel was a [godsend] to us. I don’t know what we would have done … without him. It was a very, very stressful few years. If I didn’t understand something he explained everything to me. I want to thank everyone for their help. I also want you to know how grateful I am for Gabriel’s hard work. Anyone needing representation will be very, very lucky to have Gabriel as their attorney.”

- Laural Charland

*Quilla is the pseudonym assigned by the Appeals Court.
Expansion of CLA Veterans Unit Staff

In 2023, U.S. Air Force Veteran Isaac (“Zeke”) Kennen joined CLA as a Staff Attorney in its Veterans Unit. The Unit provides comprehensive legal assistance to Veterans and their families involving housing, Veteran-specific benefits, family law, access to healthcare, character of service determinations, and discharge status issues.

Working with Veterans in Hampden and Hampshire Counties, Attorney Kennen focuses primarily on eviction defense, intervening before at-risk Veterans end up on the street or in shelters. The position is funded for one year by the Legal Services for Veterans program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.*

Veterans returning home after service often face civil legal problems as they re-integrate into their families and communities. Unfortunately, many of their issues cannot be properly remedied without the assistance of an attorney to navigate the complex laws and systems that administer Veteran-specific benefits and programs.

* The opinions, findings, and conclusions stated herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

\"Bringing free legal assistance to Veterans who cannot otherwise afford private attorneys will help address the complex social factors that affect Veterans’ health and well-being.\"

——ATTORNEY ZEKE KENNEN

CLIENT CASE

Jim’s Story

“Jim” is an elderly Veteran who served on active duty during the Vietnam war. He was referred to CLA by the Tenancy Preservation Program, a homelessness prevention program that helps tenants preserve their housing. Jim was facing possible eviction due to non-payment of rent for the efficiency unit where he had lived for the last fifteen years. After the landlord upgraded the unit, Jim’s rent jumped by over 100%, which he could not afford. After nearly a year, Jim had fallen behind in rent by thousands of dollars, and, with his limited income, had no way to pay it.

To preserve Jim’s housing, Attorney Uri Strauss first turned to finding programs that could help Jim pay the back rent he owed. Along with Housing Unit Case Manager Ashley Stone, Attorney Strauss worked with several different organizations to get nearly all of Jim’s back rent paid off. This helped to stop his eviction, but Jim also needed help in order to stay in his housing. Attorney Strauss then worked with several agencies, including the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, to get Jim a voucher to help pay for his housing going forward. With the voucher, Jim can afford to continue living in his current apartment. Providing Jim with the holistic services CLA can offer, Attorney Strauss also connected Jim with CLA’s Elder Unit. A paralegal in the unit provided Jim with information about trying to reinstate his Veterans’ benefits from the state and increasing his SNAP (formerly called “Food Stamps”). The paralegal also provided Jim with additional resources available for elders in his area.
Jessi’s Story

In one case handled by CLA’s CORI/Re-entry Unit, Staff Attorney Annie Maurer was able to help “Jessi,” a young mother in recovery, remove barriers to employment.

Jessi sought employment as a home health aide but was prevented from getting work because the Department of Public Health (DPH) decided that she was “unsuitable” for the job due to her criminal record. Jessi did, in fact, have convictions from another state that occurred when she was a teenager. After five years of incarceration, Jessi completed probation, obtained her GED, completed substance use treatment, and began actively participating in mental health treatment.

To help Jessi, Attorney Maurer first contacted the relevant courts and obtained the police reports and dockets. Attorney Maurer then helped Jessi appeal DPH’s finding of unsuitability. This advocacy included helping Jessi draft her personal statement, which highlighted the steps she took toward recovery and re-integration. In addition, Attorney Maurer wrote a brief outlining the reasons DPH should reverse its finding.

After receiving Attorney Maurer’s advocacy packet, DPH overturned its finding and Jessi immediately began training as a home health aide. Jessi ultimately became a licensed home health aide and now has a well-paying job which allows her to pay her rent and other expenses and support her young child.

“Criminal records have a devastating impact on individuals and families across the state. Civil legal assistance plays an important role in the fight to ensure access to cornerstone needs, like housing and stable sources of income. The health and well-being of communities depend on the access to resources, stability, and support of each community member.”

—SENIOR SUPERVISING ATTORNEY ALYSSA GOLDEN
On the Front Lines

Legal aid for new arrivals in Central & Western Mass.

Staff in CWJC’s Immigration Unit are on the front lines supporting new arrivals with their legal issues. Over the last year, CWJC organized five legal clinics and partnered with other agencies throughout the region on events to help individuals apply for work authorization documents. This work with new arrivals is possible thanks to grants from the Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) and the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office.

Many new arrivals have come to the U.S. fleeing violence and are seeking work authorization so that they can find employment and afford a place to live and raise their families in safety. Their ability to work also benefits employers who are looking to fill job positions due to labor shortages.

“Migration to our service area is not new. In fact, the need for immigration legal assistance has always outpaced the amount of support CWJC has been able to give. We are continuously looking for new sources of support to expand our capacity to provide quality representation to asylum-seekers and others navigating our complex immigration legal system.”

—SENIOR SUPERVISING ATTORNEY ELLEN VANSCOYOC

Racial Justice Fellow Joins CWJC

In 2023, Attorney Sara Horatius joined CWJC as a Racial Justice Fellow under a grant from the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC). Attorney Horatius will expand CWJC’s immigration legal work in the Haitian community. As a Haitian-American attorney fluent in Haitian Creole, Attorney Horatius will provide critically needed outreach, education, and legal advocacy to members of the Haitian community to help them understand their immigration-related rights and access free legal advocacy in immigration cases.

“Through this Fellowship project, we aim to expand legal representation, address disparities in immigration relief, and increase awareness within the Haitian community about legal rights and legal aid services. We are thrilled that MLAC funded this essential work through the Racial Justice Fellowship.”

—ATTORNEY KRISTEN WILLIAMS, CWJC Director

Advocacy for Families

CWJC is also working on the front lines of the housing crisis. Its Benefits Unit has been helping families experiencing homelessness access shelter through the Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter program. CWJC helps families through the cumbersome process of applying for EA, as well as those who have been denied or terminated from the program.

Under the EA program, low-income families with children and pregnant women are entitled to receive shelter if they meet certain eligibility requirements. But starting in November 2023, EA shelter space has been so limited that families are being placed on a waiting list even if they meet all of the eligibility requirements. Delays in accessing shelter mean that children may live in unsafe conditions, experience a disruption of their education, or be at risk of trauma or removal from their families.

“Although the state is a so-called ‘right to shelter’ state, there are numerous restrictions and barriers that disqualify many families from the program. In fact, shelter is not guaranteed for everyone.”

—SENIOR SUPERVISING ATTORNEY MARION HOHN

CWJC’s staff also participates in a state-wide coalition of shelter advocates who are proactively working to help improve the system, which has become overburdened in the last year.

With its advocacy in individual cases, along with its efforts with the state-wide coalition, CWJC keeps working to make sure families in crisis have access to shelter.

Anne’s Story

“Anne” and her two children, ages 3 and 5, became homeless due to a no-fault eviction after Anne’s landlord sold the building she lived in. Because Anne had no place to stay, her children temporarily stayed with her abusive former spouse while Anne lived in her car. When Anne applied for EA shelter for her children and herself one month later, her application was denied because her children were temporarily with her former spouse.

After her shelter application was denied, Anne contacted CWJC. Attorney Camden Fuller appealed the shelter denial and represented Anne during her administrative hearing. In January 2024, the hearing officer ruled in Anne’s favor because the children had always been living with Anne before she became homeless. Attorney Fuller then helped Anne reapply for shelter. Finally, six months after becoming homeless, Anne and her children were at last placed in EA shelter.
Flavio’s Story

Flavio fled to the United States after suffering persecution throughout his life due to his identity as a transgender man.

Growing up in Honduras, Flavio liked to play with boys and wear boys’ clothing. His mother would insist that he wear dresses, but as soon as Flavio was out of the house, he would change into a t-shirt and shorts. By the time he was 11, he believed that he was a lesbian, as he was attracted to girls. At school, Flavio was beaten up by boys because he liked girls.

As a young adult, Flavio was assaulted by a man who told Flavio that it would teach him to stay away from women. When Flavio went to the police, however, they refused to take his report. Soon after, a friend invited Flavio to a march in support of LGBTQ rights. When the march was breaking up, Flavio was arrested. He was pushed and insulted by the police, who told Flavio that he brought shame to the country and that people like him should not exist.

Flavio was held in a dark cell without food, water, or a bathroom for 24 hours. After he was released, Flavio was followed by police officers. Fearing further persecution, he fled Honduras.

When he reached the U.S. border, Flavio was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). While in detention, Flavio began to understand his identity as a transman.

After several months, Flavio was released from ICE detention. He made his way to Western Mass., where CWJC Attorney Karen Cole helped him with his asylum case in Immigration Court.

At his asylum hearing, Flavio was cross-examined for two hours by an ICE attorney. Although at times Flavio testified through tears, he never faltered in his explanation of his identity and his experiences. After the hearing, the Immigration Court granted his application for asylum.

Today Flavio is an asylee, working hard to support other family members back in Honduras, and continuing to find support from the LGBTQ community in the US.

Alejandro’s Story

“Alejandro” and his young daughter fled Guatemala, where they both suffered constant abuse from his former partner and Alejandro received death threats from his former partner’s new boyfriend.

In search of a better and safer life for his daughter and himself, Alejandro sought asylum in the U.S. and eventually settled in Massachusetts. Despite having gone to school in Guatemala and receiving a post-secondary education in nursing, Alejandro ended up working on a farm.

CWJC refiled Alejandro’s asylum case, which is now pending in Immigration Court. With CWJC’s help, Alejandro was able to acquire a work permit.

“Part of the advocacy that we do at CWJC is to empower our clients to take ownership of their cases and their lives. While applying for a work permit with a pending asylum application may seem routine, it is a lifeline to workers who have no other way to legitimize themselves in the eyes of employers. After acquiring a work permit, Alejandro felt empowered to assert his rights as well as those of others.”

—ATTORNEY CLAUDIA QUINTERO, Staff Attorney, Migrant & Seasonal Farmworker Project

Advocacy for Farmworkers

CWJC houses the Migrant & Seasonal Farmworker Project, a program that provides services to low-income agricultural and migrant laborers across Massachusetts.

The attorneys and paralegals in CWJC’s Immigration Unit work across our five-county service area. Last year, the unit assisted over 1,400 people including victims of crime, human trafficking, and domestic violence; abused, abandoned, or neglected children; and those seeking asylum because of persecution in their home countries.

The attorneys and paralegals in CWJC’s Immigration Unit work across our five-county service area. Last year, the unit assisted over 1,400 people including victims of crime, human trafficking, and domestic violence; abused, abandoned, or neglected children; and those seeking asylum because of persecution in their home countries.
On behalf of our client communities, CLA Pro Bono thanks the following attorneys for their volunteer service in 2023.

Joel Abu
Akosa Agyepong
Abra C. Allexens
Katherine E. Amato
Ryan P. Avery
Barry Bachrach
Rhonda L. Bachrach
James E. Baker
Michelle Begley
Peter Benjamin
Gerald B. Berg
Krystle Bernier
Pavel Bespalko
Daniel Blakeley
Erik Bradbury
Lauren E. Bretta
Christine Brosnihan
James T. Brown
Edward C. Bryant
Jeffrey A. Burnstein
Kathryn Calo
Linda T. Cammuso
Mary Yanneth
Bermudez Camp
M. Trant Campbell
Nicholas Carbone
Maureen Carroll
Chelsea Choi
Lillian Chinienya
Chukwurah
Timothy A. Cifonelli
David R. Cianflone
Bernard S. Cohen
Lawrence E. Cohen
Casey Connors
Angelo Corrado
Kathryn S. Crouss
Ann Dargie
Hyman G. Darling
Lauren De Oliveira
Christine E. Devine
Julie Ann Dialelli-Laffey
Julie Dick
Ashlyn Dowd
Gillian Szlachetka
Dubay
Marjorie Dunlap
David Dupont
James Edwards
Charles J. Eusey
Michele Feinstein
Joel H. Feldman
Stephanie Fitzgerald
Jessica Flaherty
Christine A. Ford
Terry M. Ford
Michael A. Fraze
Helena Friedman
Robert A. George
Melissa R. Gillis
Robert E. Girvan III
Nathaniel A. Tripp
B rian Tessier
Stanley A. Szlachetka
Andrew P. Strehle
Sean Smith
Alison Silber
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Edward A. O’Brien
Philip D. O’Connell
Andrea O’Connor
James L. O’Connor
William O’Neil
Kathleen F. O’Sullivan
Dan Ordonica
Craig Ornell
Chi Suk Kim
Kelly Koch
Eric D. Kornblum
Robert W. Kovacs
Jonathan Labonte
Nicole Reeves Lavallee
Darren Lee
Mark Twombly Lee
Catherine Lombardo
Christian W. Lund
Beth A. Lux
Dawn M. MacKinnon
Courtney E. Mayo
Xai McDonald
Nadia R. McGourthy
Cherie McKenna
Wendy M. Mead
David Miranda
Carolyn M. Mitchell
Jonathan Molluer
Michael Molstad
Janet Moore
Mark Morisi
Jeffrey Morneau
Jane W. Motter
Brian Murphy
Elizabeth Myska
Carrie Naatz
Jamie Narus
NVI Nguyen
Kate Nicholson
Edward A. O’Brien
Philip D. O’Connell
Andrea O’Connor
James L. O’Connor
William O’Neil
Kathleen F. O’Sullivan
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Lynette Paczkowski
Stephen Pagnotta
Mark A. Papirio
Michael Pastore
Paul Payard
Steven D. Pohl
Debora J. Queenney
Henry Raphaelson
Justin Raphaelson
Michael W. Reining
Kara Rescia
Régina Ressia
Maria Rivera-Cotto
Caroline Robillard
Louis S. Robin
Valeska Ross
Julie Rougeau
Benjamin C. Rudolf
Janet Ruggieri
Barry M. Ryan
Hon. David Sacks (Ret.)
Mary A. Samberg
Massiel Sanchez
Ralph W. Sargent
Carolyn E. Scott-Howe
David G. Sharp
Christopher Sharry
Alison Silber
David Simanski
Sean Smith
Andrew P. Strehle
Peter J. Sturgeon
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Brian Tessier
Nathaniel A. Tripp
Elana Tsizer
Christina M. Turgeon
Christina M. Turgeon
Elena Tsizer
Nathaniel A. Tripp
B rian Tessier
Stanley A. Szlachetka
Andrew P. Strehle
Peter J. Sturgeon
Stanley A. Szlachetka
Brian Tessier
Nathaniel A. Tripp
Elana Tsizer
Christina M. Turgeon

Paige M. Vaillancourt
Tom G. Vukmirovits
Reid Wakefield
James Walckner
Brian Waller
Gary M. Weiner
James A. Whitbeck
Heather Jill Williams
Susan M. Williams
Thomas N. Wilson

Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) volunteers are bolded

558
Cases handled
2,312
Hours donated
$443,914
Worth of in-kind donations

“Attorney [James] Whitbeck was so kind and so skillful at helping me navigate the bankruptcy system. This reduced the intense anxiety I experienced on a daily basis, for years—having someone kind and gentle ‘in my corner’ provided a significant boost to my morale, my well-being.

I truly thank everyone at Community Legal Aid—for their efficiency in managing my case—the quick turnaround from the Northampton to the Springfield office, and then the referral to Attorney Whitbeck.

I felt such respect from everyone.

I am truly humbled by the gift of this service.”

CLLA is grateful to Attorney Dowd, whose pro bono service has had a positive effect on the health and well-being of this vulnerable client and others whom she has helped.

CNN is an Associate at Mirick O’Connell in its Labor, Employment and Employee Benefits and Education Law groups.

Attorney Dowd has also assisted many clients through her pro bono service with CLA.

A volunteer since 2021, Attorney Dowd has advocated for multiple clients referred to her by CLA’s UMass Memorial Medical-Legal Partnership, a collaboration that addresses the social determinants of health that negatively affect the well-being of patients.

In a recent case, Attorney Dowd effectively addressed the shockingly bad conditions in the home of an elderly UMass Memorial patient, “Katherine.” Katherine was a long-time tenant who had significant medical needs due to congestive heart failure.

In the winter of 2022, Katherine notified her landlord that she did not have heat or hot water, had non-working appliances, and was experiencing a mouse infestation in her unit. Her situation only worsened when her bathroom and kitchen flooded, resulting in her bathtub being the only access to water in the entire apartment.

Attorney Dowd advocated for months alongside Katherine and the Board of Health to make sure the landlord did his part to provide a safe and habitable living environment. At the conclusion of the case, Katherine stated that she finally felt that she could breathe easy as Attorney Dowd made sure that all her legal needs were met.

CLA is grateful to Attorney Dowd, whose pro bono service has had a positive effect on the health and well-being of this vulnerable client and others whom she has helped.
Thank You

“I am deeply grateful for everyone—from our dedicated Board of Directors, to our incredible staff, to our generous donors and funders—who contributed to making CLA the robust and highly effective nonprofit that it is.

While last year CLA handled over 8,000 cases, impacting over 20,000 residents of Central and Western Massachusetts, many other people still need our assistance. In the coming year, we hope to continue expanding our legal services as well as our presence within the communities we serve.

Our legal services would not be available without the financial support of state, federal, and private funders as well as individual donors. Your support contributes to the ripples of justice that CLA’s work sends forth.”

—HON. LUIS PEREZ (RET.), Board President

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, peers, and friends to support our work. Our fiscal year 2023 Access to Justice Campaign, which began on October 1, 2022 and ran through the spring of 2023, raised over $161,000 from over 600 individuals, law firms, and other businesses.

We could not achieve such results without the help of our committee chairs and committee members. We are incredibly grateful for their work on our behalf. All committee members are recognized in bold in the donor list. Thank you to all our volunteers!

In the autumn of 2023, CLA celebrated the kickoff of its FY 2024 Access to Justice Campaign with events in Worcester and Franklin Counties.

Worcester County Event Celebrates Access to Justice

At the Worcester County Access to Justice Campaign kickoff event, CLA Board Member Natasha Torres explained how the organization has played a crucial role in her life.

“For over 10 years now I’ve been not only a Board Member, but a donor and someone who loves to share her story to let others know how vital this nonprofit is in our community.”

The festivities at the Worcester County kickoff included live music by Worcester-based folk duo Ash & Eric. In September 2023, Ash & Eric announced their support for CLA by pledging 10% of the revenue they obtained during a three-month period to the organization.

Franklin County Launches Access to Justice Campaign

The Franklin County Access to Justice Committee held its kickoff luncheon in Greenfield, just steps away from where CLA is planning to open a new office in the next year. Speakers included Senator Jo Comerford, who told the crowd,

“Our office is sometimes the doorway for people who are out of time and out of options. Desperate. Exhausted from grappling with all manner of obstacles. And our first call is very often to CLA.”

“We love our city and we love the folks who are fighting for the rights of the beautiful people who live here. [CLA] has been a heavy hitter in the fight against housing discrimination—an issue that’s really important to us ... Thanks for all you do, CLA!”

—FOLK DUO ASH & ERIC, who performed at the Worcester Country Access to Justice kickoff event

Pictured at the Franklin County Access to Justice Luncheon, left to right, Executive Director Jonathan Mannina; Board Member Dorothy Storrow; Board Member Hon. Beth Crawford (Ret.); Managing Attorney Jennifer Dieringer; Senator Jo Comerford; and Senior Supervising Attorney Alyssa Golden.

Pictured at the Worcester County Access to Justice Campaign kickoff event, left to right, Managing Attorney Lyonel Jean-Pierre Jr.; Attorney Leonardo Angiulo; Board Member Lynette Paczkowski; Board Member Natasha Torres (front); Board President Hon. Luis Perez (Ret.); Attorney J. Robert Seder, former President of CLA’s predecessor organization, Legal Aid Society (1972 to 1975); and Executive Director Jonathan Mannina.
Thank you to the following foundations, corporations, and community organizations for recognizing the importance of ensuring fairness and justice in the legal system by providing grants to Community Legal Aid. Your generosity and partnership are essential to our vision of justice for all.

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Cy Pres Awards Allow for Expansion of CLA’s Employment Unit

In 2023, CLA received three cy pres awards. Cy pres awards allow unclaimed settlement funds from class action lawsuits to be distributed to organizations that do work which is related to the subject matter of the lawsuit.

The awards, totaling over $220,000, will be directed toward CLA’s Employment Unit. Consisting of five attorneys and two paralegals, the unit represents workers seeking unemployment benefits as well as workers with claims related to wage theft, employment discrimination, and family and medical leave. The awards will allow CLA to expand its team of attorneys and paralegals who provide employment-related legal assistance to low-income workers.

The awards resulted from class action settlements of cases with ties to Hampden County. One award was directed by Phillip J. Gordon of the Gordon Law Group. Two awards were directed to CLA by the Law Office of Nicholas F. Ortiz, P.C.

“As an attorney leading a firm of litigators and counselors who fight for workers’ and consumers’ rights, I know that it is not uncommon for low-wage workers in various industries to be subject to wage theft and other violations of their legal rights. I am pleased to be able to support the work of Community Legal Aid to vindicate the rights of low-income workers.”

—ATTORNEY NICHOLAS ORTIZ

Community Legal Aid is grateful to Country Bank for their generous support of our Language Access Program, which provides translation services to our clients who primarily speak a language other than English. Pictured: Jodie Gerulaitis, Country Bank’s Vice President of Community Relations; Jennifer Dieringer, CLA Managing Attorney; and Tom Navin, CLA Development Director.
Donors

Thank you to our fiscal year 2023 donors. The below list recognizes gifts received between October 1, 2022 and September 30, 2023.

Members of the Access to Justice Campaign Committee are bolded.
(*) indicates members of our Loyalty to Justice Circle, which celebrates donors who have made five or more gifts in support of our work.
(†) indicates deceased supporters of our work.

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“I donate to Community Legal Aid because I support its mission to improve the lives of our disenfranchised neighbors and effect systemic change. The need in the community is profound, and I believe members of the private bar have a responsibility to ensure fair access to justice. When invited to serve on CLA’s board, I wholeheartedly said yes. It is a privilege to be part of an organization that leads with innovation and collaboration.”

—SEUNGHEE CHA, LLM, Bulkeley Richardson, & Gelinas, LLP; CLA Board Member & Committee Member of the Hampshire County Access to Justice Campaign
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We would also like to collectively recognize those donors who made gifts of under $100 during fiscal year 2023. Although space limitations prevent us from listing each of our donors, we are truly grateful to every donor who has supported our work. Gifts of all sizes make a difference to Community Legal Aid.

For a full list of our FY 2023 donors, please visit communitylegal.org/donors.

Memorial Gifts

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

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In Honor of Wendy Berg and Jay Libourn
Mimi Boxwell
In Honor of Charles Casartello Jr.
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In Honor of Lucy DeLaCOUR
Benjamin Barnes
In Honor of John DiBartolo Jr.
Leonard Jekanowski
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In Honor of Mark Gold
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In Honor of Gloria Herbert
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In Honor of John and Gloria Hogarth
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In Honor of Carrie Acus Love

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Paul Navin
Michael O’Neil

"I support Community Legal Aid because I believe that access to justice should not depend on how much money you have. I have seen people deprived of food, shelter and fundamental rights because they did not know their rights and did not have an advocate to assert their rights. CLA’s advocates provide critical advice and representation to the most vulnerable people in our Western Massachusetts communities. Supporting Community Legal Aid is an investment in justice."

—DOROTHY STORROW, Esq., CLA Board Member & Co-Chair, Franklin County Access to Justice Campaign
CLA and the wider Massachusetts legal aid community lost a champion in June 2023, when Honorable Edward Ginsburg (Ret.) passed away at the age of 90.

As a Judge in the Probate & Family Court, Judge Ginsburg witnessed firsthand the struggles facing litigants who navigated family law matters unrepresented. After his retirement from the bench in 2002, Judge Ginsburg founded Senior Partners for Justice, a program that recruits experienced lawyers from all legal backgrounds to serve those who would otherwise go unrepresented in court. In 2005, he joined CLA as a Senior Supervising Attorney in the Family Law Unit.

His devotion to helping the vulnerable did not go unnoticed. He was named one of the 2004 Lawyers of the Year by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly and received the Adams Pro Bono Publico Award from the Supreme Judicial Court Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Services in 2005.

Above all he accomplished, he was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather, and a valued member of the CLA community. Both his sage legal wisdom and cheery presence in the Worcester office are sorely missed.
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As of Sept. 30, 2023

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Carmen Agostini
Noemi Arguinzoni-Jimenez
Camila Arsenault
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Nengi Jennifer Omo-Egbekuse (MLAC Bart Gordon Fellow)

Celebrating 25 Years of Service

Director of Client Access Gordon Shaw (pictured) and Executive Director Jonathan Mannina celebrated 25 years of service to legal aid in 2023.

2023 Public Service Awards

Carmen Gonzalez,
Senior Supervising Attorney for the Elder Law Unit and Disability Benefits Project, received the Massachusetts Bar Association’s Community Service Award at the Worcester County Bar Association’s Law Day event.

Rachel Shannon Brown,
Senior Supervising Attorney for the Elder Law Unit and Disability Benefits Project, was one of two recipients of the Hampden County Bar Association’s annual John M. Greaney Award.

CWJC Team
As of Sept. 30, 2023

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Alexandra Bonazoli
Ann Cascanett
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Jessica David
Caroline Foley
Claudia Folgosa
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Laitza Chaperon Germain

Awards
2023 Public Interest Alumni Awards

A total of 11 law students joined CLA and CWJC as summer interns in 2023. Interns worked in CLA’s Worcester, Fitchburg, Springfield, and Northampton offices, in several different units. Pictured: Summer Interns working in Worcester County.

Johanna Greenberg
Luis Guererro
Marion Hohn
Marla Jakubiak
Grace Jennetta
Benjamin Levine
Nancy Lopez Ramirez
Kelly Morgan
Jose Gabriel Otero
Laura Putnam
Claudia Quintero
Tania Rodriguez Reyes
Océane Roux
Emsy Nadine Stille
Ellen VanScyoc
AmeriCorps:
Raine Naylor
Fellows:
Sara Horatius (MLAC Racial Justice Fellow)
Maya McCann (Equal Justice Works Fellow Sponsored by Fidelity Investments and Mintz)
Financials

Community Legal Aid and Affiliate statement of activities for the twelve months ending September 30, 2023

**REVENUE**

Federal Government Grants $5,906,868  
State & Local $12,837,090  
Foundation Grants $921,767  
Private Fundraising $255,872  
United Way Grants $119,331  
Attorneys' Fees $44,022  
Cy Pres $223,882  
Other Income $563,626  

Revenue Before Donated Services $20,872,459  
Donated Services – Attorneys $443,914  
Total Revenue After Donated Services $21,316,373

**ALLOCATION OF EXPENSES**

- 88% Program Services  
- 9% Management & General  
- 3% Fundraising

**Hampshire County**

- 13.3% increase in cases related to housing

**Franklin County**

- 7.5% increase in overall cases

**Berkshire County**

- 129% increase in cases related to CORI/Re-entry

**Hampden County**

- 8.4% increase in cases related to immigration

**Coming soon! CLA has announced plans for a new main office in Greenfield to expand our services for Franklin County residents.**

**Main Offices**

- Fitchburg  
  515 Main Street  
  Fitchburg, MA 01420  
- Northampton  
  20 Hampton Avenue  
  Northampton, MA 01060  
- Pittsfield  
  152 North Street  
  Pittsfield, MA 01201  
- Springfield  
  One Monarch Place  
  Springfield, MA 01144  
- Worcester  
  370 Main Street, Ste. 200  
  Worcester, MA 01608

**Satellite Offices**

- Greenfield  
  55 Federal Street  
  Greenfield, MA 01301  
- Holyoke  
  Holyoke Health Center  
  230 Maple Street  
  Holyoke, MA 01040  
- Milford  
  60 North Bow Street  
  Milford, MA 01757  
- North Adams  
  33 Main Street  
  North Adams, MA 01247  
- Southbridge  
  79 Elm Street  
  Southbridge, MA 01550

Community Legal Aid and its affiliate, Central West Justice Center, are proud to serve the five counties of Western and Central Massachusetts.
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.

MAKE A GIFT TO COMMUNITY LEGAL AID!

Local organizations and individuals like you make Community Legal Aid’s work possible. Help CLA continue to thrive by making a tax-deductible gift today. communitylegal.org/donate

JOIN COMMUNITY LEGAL AID’S PRO BONO PROGRAM!

CLA’s volunteers greatly enhance our ability to make justice real for our clients. We refer hundreds of cases a year to attorneys with all levels of experience. Learn more or sign up to volunteer at communitylegal.org/pro-bono


With support from