

Leaders of civil legal aid groups thank supporters

Published: July 13, 2009

To the editor:

We appreciate the editorial recognizing the efforts of the Massachusetts legal community ("A proud day for supporters of legal aid," June 29), which advocated so ardently on behalf of civil legal aid funding in the recently enacted FY10 budget of the commonwealth.

Although the \$9.5 million appropriated for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corp. represents a \$1.6 million cut over last year's appropriation, we are well aware that many state-supported programs fared far worse.

The other source of funding for MLAC, revenue generated by IOLTA accounts, has been decimated by the recession. As a result, for the year that just ended, MLAC was forced to reduce its general support grants to legal aid programs by 46 percent. For FY10, we anticipate that MLAC will have to cut its total grants by an additional 30 percent.

It is not an overstatement to say that the combination of IOLTA losses and the reduction in the appropriation have done serious damage to the delivery of civil legal aid in the commonwealth. At a time when demand for assistance is up, legal aid programs are forced to turn away far too many people with critical legal problems.

However, as a result of the energy and enthusiasm of the leaders of the Boston Bar Association, Massachusetts Bar Association, county bar associations, Boston area law firms, general counsels of prominent Massachusetts companies and institutions, and hundreds of private attorneys throughout the commonwealth, access to justice remains a priority for Massachusetts.

Our sincere thanks to all who were a part of this effort.

Lonnie A. Powers

Executive director, Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corp.

Julia Huston

Chair, Equal Justice Coalition