

# A Year Like No Other



## Dear Friends & Supporters,

As I reflect on the past year's unprecedented challenges, I am deeply humbled by the dedication of the Community Legal Aid family to the fight for equal justice for all.

In the span of just a few months in early 2020, almost everything about the work that we do here at Community Legal Aid changed. We found ourselves overwhelmed with requests for assistance because our low-income and elderly clients had lost their jobs or their homes, because their children with disabilities were unable to participate in virtual schooling, or because they faced increased family violence as they quarantined in their homes. Some of our clients contracted COVID-19. Other clients visited food banks for the first time in their lives to avoid going hungry. And we all watched in horror as the brutal murder of George Floyd reminded us how far we have yet to go to achieve true justice and equality.

It is often during times of hardship that our strengths become most visible, and the strength of the CLA community has allowed us to meet the difficulties of 2020 with courage and resilience. This year has challenged us like never before, but it also showcased our creativity, determination,

and compassion. Our staff and volunteers quickly adapted to working in a virtual world and tackling the new civil legal issues affecting our clients, and we continued to proudly stand up for racial justice.

Throughout the pandemic, we have continued to evaluate and expand our services to meet the needs of our clients. Thanks to funding from some of our generous community partners, we started several notable projects which are highlighted in this report. And our donors opened their hearts to support us because they understood that the need was so much greater. I am deeply grateful to everyone in the CLA family, including our board, staff, volunteers, donors, and funders, for the strength we have found together to continue our pursuit of equal justice.

Thank you.



Sincerely,

Jonathan Mannina, Esq.  
Executive Director

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## 2020 in Numbers

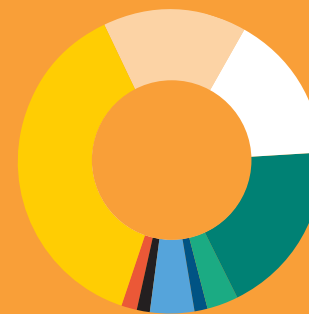
### CASES HANDLED

7,280  
Total Cases

5,255  
Total CLA cases

2,025  
Total Central West Justice Center cases\*

### AREAS OF LAW



- 2,622 Housing and homelessness
- 1,076 Keeping families safe
- 1,091 Maximizing incomes
- 1,286 Working towards citizenship
- 235 Helping veterans
- 94 Employment (excluding unemployment benefits)
- 329 Unemployment
- 99 Keeping kids in school
- 104 Re-Entry after incarceration

### POPULATION SERVED

#### INCOME

78% Up to \$125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines\*

17% Between 125% and 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines\*\*

5% Over 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines

Federal Poverty Guidelines (2020)

\*125%: Pre-tax annual income of \$15,950 for an individual or \$32,750 for a family of four

\*\*200%: Pre-tax annual income of \$25,520 for an individual or \$52,400 for a family of four

#### AGE

20% 60 and older

75% 19-59 yrs

5% Under 19 yrs

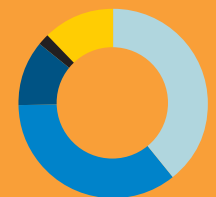
#### GENDER

69% Female identified

29% Male identified

2% Gender not identified

#### ETHNICITY



- 39% White
- 35% Hispanic
- 11% Black
- 2% Asian
- 12% Other

TOGETHER WITH OUR COMMUNITY

# CLA Launches New Initiatives to Respond to COVID



Community Legal Aid is grateful to our many community partners who supported new initiatives and expansion of services during the pandemic. This funding allowed CLA to respond quickly and creatively to the crisis.

## EXPANSION OF EDUCATION LAW

With funding provided by the **Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts**, **Northern Berkshire United Way**, **Berkshire United Way**, **Williamstown Community Chest**, and **Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation**, CLA expanded its education law practice from Hampden and Worcester Counties to Berkshire, Franklin, and Hampshire Counties. This funding supported the hiring of a new staff attorney to assist low-income families with issues related to their children's education.

CLA has provided legal services to students with education-related legal needs since 2017. The statewide closure of public schools due to COVID-19 and the ensuing transition to remote or hybrid learning presented unprecedented challenges for students, especially those with special needs. CLA's education law attorneys were able to respond nimbly to the increased need for legal advocacy for these students.

## EXPANSION OF EMPLOYMENT LAW

After a spike in unemployment-related cases involving low-wage workers affected by the COVID-19 crisis, CLA hired an additional attorney to focus on serving these clients. CLA has assisted workers in a number of ways, including answering their questions about their eligibility for unemployment benefits, filing appeals on behalf of workers who are denied benefits, helping workers access new federal leave benefits, and protecting the rights of employees facing discrimination related to COVID-19. This important expansion of services was possible thanks to funding from the **Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts** and the **Worcester Together Fund** (the **Greater Worcester Community Foundation**, the **United Way of Central Massachusetts**, and the **City of Worcester**).

## CASE MANAGER FOR HOUSING CLIENTS

With funding provided by **Health New England** and the **Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts COVID-19 Response Fund**, CLA hired a Case Manager to assist its housing clients in Western Massachusetts. The economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated many low-income community members, putting them at risk of eviction and homelessness. CLA's advocates are able to provide legal assistance to defend against evictions, but the crisis has also created or worsened financial, social, medical, and mental health issues that impact people's abilities to maintain stable housing and successful tenancies. The Case Manager works in collaboration with CLA's housing attorneys to identify non-legal barriers to housing and secure needed services to remove them. For example, the Case Manager helps tenants access rental assistance programs to pay off rent arrearages, thereby avoiding eviction and homelessness. The Case Manager also helps clients obtain benefits like food stamps or insurance coverage for medical or mental health problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated many low-income community members, putting them at risk of eviction and homelessness.

CLA took on  
**7X**  
the number of  
employment cases in  
2020 compared  
to 2019



# Preserving Housing and Preventing Homelessness

**CLA's Housing and Homelessness Unit** accepts cases that range from obtaining Emergency Assistance shelter benefits or HomeBASE rental assistance to helping enforce rights under the Americans With Disabilities Act and improving living conditions.

With a dedicated and experienced staff, led by Senior Supervising Attorney Jane Edmonstone, the Housing and Homelessness Unit was able to respond effectively to the

housing crisis that followed the pandemic. Despite the six-month statewide moratorium on evictions, low-income and elderly tenants still faced the risk of eviction in certain situations, lock-outs, utility shut-offs, or other emergency issues. CLA and CWJC quickly adapted their work on behalf of tenants facing evictions or emergency housing issues by assisting tenants in telephonic or virtual hearings with the Housing Court.

## COVID-19 EVICTION LEGAL HELP PROJECT (CELHP)

**In the fall of 2020**, CLA was granted money by the state to launch the COVID-19 Eviction Legal Help Project (CELHP). The project provides urgently needed legal assistance to prevent displacement and homelessness and is part of a statewide Eviction Diversion Initiative to combat the increase in evictions arising during the pandemic. To staff the ambitious new project, CLA hired a team of attorneys, paralegals, case managers, and support staff.

CELHP attorneys give legal advice to tenants facing evictions, staff Lawyer-for-the-Day programs in court, and represent clients in trials and mediations. CELHP intake paralegals are the first point of contact for tenants seeking help, and CELHP case managers

work with tenants to help them apply for the increased benefits offered by the state as part of the Eviction Diversion Initiative, such as the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) Program. RAFT can be used for a variety of needs, including rent or mortgage arrears, security deposits, and other expenses to help tenants preserve current housing or move to new housing. The team approach has allowed CLA to help hundreds of tenants maintain their housing at a time when eviction and homelessness would pose unprecedented risks to their health and safety.

## CLIENT CASE

### *Justice Via Zoom*

CWJC Attorney **Blair Komar** won a Motion for a New Trial in Housing Court on behalf of a tenant who had represented herself at a remote eviction trial over Zoom and was unable to present evidence in her defense due to her limited technology.

The trial took place shortly after the state's eviction moratorium had expired. The tenant had filed counterclaims against her landlord regarding conditions in her apartment such as pest infestation and mold. Prior to trial, the tenant shared documents that supported her counterclaims with the landlord's counsel, including photos of the bad conditions, Board of Health reports, and an email notifying the landlord of the bad conditions. But due to technical

difficulties, she was unable to electronically file these documents and photos with the Court.

At the trial conducted over Zoom, the tenant also tried but was unable to show her evidence to the Court using her iPad. As a result, her evidence was not admitted. Without evidence to back up her counterclaims, the Court found in favor of her landlord and gave the landlord permission to evict the tenant.

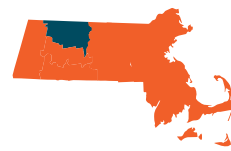
In her motion for a new trial, Attorney Komar argued that the tenant was deprived of her due process right to present evidence in her defense. Attorney Komar argued that a trial should be a contest of facts and evidence, not a dispute about who has the superior technology. The Court agreed and granted the motion for a new trial, giving the tenant the opportunity to have her case decided on the merits.

Attorney Komar argued that a trial should be a contest of facts and evidence, not a dispute about who has the superior technology.

◀ STAFF ATTORNEY BLAIR KOMAR



# Housing Stability in Franklin County & North Quabbin Region



**T**he criminal court system and the criminalization

of addiction wreak havoc on communities and families. Criminal convictions and eviction records follow people long after the underlying court involvement is over, posing sometimes insurmountable barriers to obtaining affordable, safe housing and steady employment.

With a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), CLA is a partner in the Improving Housing to Improve Health (IH<sup>2</sup>) Project with Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, and Citizens Housing and Planning Association. This project is designed to improve systems that limit access to housing in the Franklin County/North Quabbin region. CLA's role is to build access to affordable housing for people with substance use disorder (SUD) and/or criminal records through representation in public and subsidized housing denials and terminations in Franklin County and the North Quabbin region. Further, by assisting people with criminal record sealing and expungement, CLA helps eradicate the barriers criminal records cause before they pose a problem.

“Decisions I made during active addiction were holding me back from accessing affordable housing.”

## CLIENT CASE

### Crystal's Story

When Crystal Wells's name came to the top of the waitlist in Franklin County for a Housing Choice Voucher, she quickly submitted her application. “After waiting a very long time to receive a voucher for housing, the excitement cannot be described in words when you finally get the letter stating you're at the top of the list,” Ms. Wells explained.

A week later, Ms. Wells received a denial letter. “I had a criminal history that followed me into my recovery. Decisions I made during active addiction were holding me back from accessing affordable housing which I needed to better my life for myself and for my son. I was a bit hesitant, but decided I had nothing to lose by appealing the decision.”

At the time that CLA began assisting Ms. Wells, she had been living with her infant son at a dual diagnosis treatment program for ten

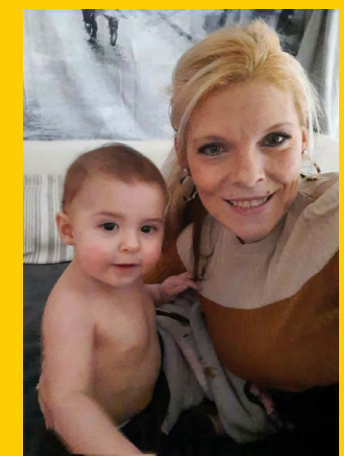
months. Dedicated to her recovery, she was actively involved in AA and the Franklin Family Drug Court program, and had developed a strong support network.

Working together, Ms. Wells and CLA Attorney Alyssa Golden presented her case on appeal and successfully overturned her voucher denial. This was not only a win for Ms. Wells, but also resulted in a request from the housing authority that Attorney Golden assist it in developing policies regarding the use of criminal records in its housing decisions. This will result in a clearer, more transparent process for future applicants. Ms. Wells's fight ultimately improves the situation not only for herself and her child, but for her community as a whole.

This was not, however, the end of the fight for Ms. Wells. After obtaining her voucher, she applied to use it at a housing complex which in turn denied Ms. Wells because of her criminal record. The team again fought and won that appeal.

Ms. Wells has since moved

into a new apartment with her 9-month-old son. “I have fourteen months sober, I'm on the final phase of Family Drug Court, and I graduated from my treatment program. I am now an advisor for the Improving Housing to Improve Health advisory board. Without the decision to appeal my denials and the courage that my recovery has given me, I would not have this beautiful apartment to live and raise my child in. I will forever be grateful to Alyssa Golden for walking side by side with me during this process.”



CRYSTAL WELLS AND SON.

# Racial Justice

Community Legal Aid is committed to promoting racial equity, fighting discrimination, and partnering with our neighbors to empower communities of color. The goal of racial justice is integrated into all of our practice areas, as well as the following special advocacy initiatives:

- **Fair Housing Project:** CLA's core housing work includes helping tenants combat illegal housing practices, including race-based harassment and discrimination. In Worcester, the Project conducts educational workshops on fair housing laws for tenant groups, social service providers, landlords, and other community members. The Project also trains civil rights investigators to "test" whether housing providers are unlawfully discriminating against tenants and applicants for housing in Worcester.
- **Asian Outreach and Advocacy Project:** With support from the Harry H. Dow Memorial Legal Assistance Fund, CLA increases access to legal services for the Asian immigrant and refugee populations in the Worcester area. Our Project's outreach and advocacy efforts are tailored towards providing culturally and linguistically responsive advocacy, community education, and public awareness of the challenges facing this population.
- **CORI/Re-Entry Project:** Our attorneys focus on helping formerly incarcerated individuals overcome barriers to housing, employment, and other opportunities in order to reintegrate into society, an essential first step in their ability to live safe and stable lives.
- **Migrant Farmworker Project:** The Central West Justice Center houses the Migrant Farmworker Project, which provides legal services to the state's agricultural workers and other migrant laborers on issues of immigration, employment discrimination, wage and hour claims, housing, and other matters.
- **Medical Legal Partnerships (MLPs):** CLA partners with local health care providers to accept referrals for patients whose medical issues may be improved through legal advocacy. Many of these health-harming legal needs disproportionately affect communities of color. Our attorneys educate local medical providers about the social determinants of health, including the racial justice issues that contribute to poor health outcomes and health disparities.
- **Education Law:** Our attorneys help students from low-income families access the education to which they are entitled. We provide legal assistance around issues of special education, school discipline, bullying, language access, and protections for students experiencing homelessness.
- **Racial Justice Fellowships:** CLA is committed to pursuing fellowships that amplify our racial justice work. A few recent fellowships we have received are the MLAC Racial Justice Fellowship to address systemic issues, the Bart Gordon Fellowship to improve legal access for those facing linguistic or cultural barriers, and four Shriver Center Racial Justice Institute Fellowships to advance race equity advocacy and organizational alignment.

## CLIENT CASE

### *Racism in the Justice System*

Our legal system has a long and painful history of institutional racism, and communities of color are affected to this day by disproportionate arrests, convictions, and sentences in the criminal justice system. Robert Hunter experienced these negative, long-lasting effects first-hand when he sought a safe, decent place to live and came up against barriers posed by his past involvement with the system. Mr. Hunter is an Army veteran who had been homeless and living at a veterans' shelter for 15 months. Seeking stable and affordable housing, he applied to the Worcester Housing Authority for a subsidized housing unit. His application was denied, however, because his criminal offender record information ("CORI") included a negative history. He reached out for help.

In reviewing the records, staff attorney Blair Komar found that Mr. Hunter's CORI contained several errors. Attorney Komar worked with CLA's Pro Bono team to recruit a local attorney, Justin Raphaelson, to help Robert correct his inaccurate CORI. Attorney Raphaelson successfully filed an emergency motion in Worcester District Court to correct the errors in Robert's CORI that prevented him from obtaining stable housing. Once the CORI was corrected, the Worcester Housing Authority reversed its denial and approved Robert for subsidized housing. This finally ended Robert's 15 months living in a homeless veterans' shelter. Robert is very relieved and thankful to be living in his safe and affordable home.

CLIENT CASE

## Dolores's Story

“Dolores” was rushed to the emergency room by ambulance and hospitalized with acute pneumonia for more than a week. Despite Dolores’s obvious medical need for the ambulance, Medicare inexplicably denied coverage. Dolores appealed the denial, but never received a response from Medicare. After she was contacted by a debt collection agency, she reached out to Community Legal Aid for help.

CLA Attorney Rachel Brown worked with Dolores to track down her original appeal and to request that Medicare issue a decision on that appeal. As a result of Attorney Brown’s advocacy, Medicare reinstated Dolores’s appeal and concluded that her ambulance trip was medically necessary. Medicare paid the ambulance trip in full, unburdening Dolores from an expensive bill that she could not afford to pay.



## CARES ACT FUNDING AWARDED TO CLA FOR Assisting Elders

Community Legal Aid is grateful to **Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, Elder Services of Berkshire County, Greater Springfield Senior Services, Highland Valley Elder Services, LifePath Inc., and WestMass Elder Care** for awarding a total of over \$100,000 of supplemental funds to support our work with elders.

The funding was made possible by the federal government’s Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and was intended to support the health, safety, and independence of senior citizens during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The additional funding ensured that seniors and elder service providers knew about the additional benefits, protections, and entitlements available to elders during the pandemic. The funding also enabled Community Legal Aid to respond to new legal issues arising from the pandemic.

# Family Law

Our Family Law Unit has responded to the needs of clients who are survivors of domestic violence, working under the challenging circumstances presented by remote litigation due to the COVID crisis.

Several years ago, “Anna” came to the United States from Poland to marry her fiancé. Almost immediately after the marriage, however, she realized that her new husband was controlling, threatening, and abusive. For years, Anna was not allowed to leave their rural home without her husband accompanying her. They had two children together, which only increased the opportunities for her husband to exert control over her.

Like many survivors of domestic violence, Anna suffered through the abuse for several years. It was not until her husband began turning his abusive behavior toward their two children that she took action to leave the marriage. With representation by CLA Attorney Julie Dick, Anna obtained a restraining order, accessed emergency housing, impounded her address, and began moving forward with a divorce.

A year and a half of contentious litigation ensued, which included multiple hearings on motions for temporary orders and contempt. All of these events were complicated by difficulty accessing court interpreters for Anna.

During one hearing, Anna’s husband was allowed to cross examine her. His questions revealed his controlling and abusive conduct. He revealed that he believed that since he had brought the client to this country, he therefore owned her choices, her actions, and access to her body. With Attorney Dick’s preparation and support, Anna answered his

questions with clarity and dignity, and the Court credited her testimony over his.

After the Zoom trial, the Worcester Probate and Family Court issued a judgment granting Anna sole legal and physical custody of their children and requiring safe boundaries around any parenting time with the children that may happen in the future. The Court also granted a fair child support order and an equitable distribution of marital tax debt.

After years of being told by her abuser that she would not be believed over an American and could not count on the courts to help her, our client – and justice – prevailed.



STAFF ATTORNEY JULIE DICK

**The Central West Justice Center**, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Community Legal Aid, provides free legal help to low-income and elderly residents of Central and Western Massachusetts. CWJC's advocates focus on cases involving humanitarian-based immigration law, employment rights, housing and homelessness issues, and access to public benefits. CWJC also houses the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker and Food Security Projects.

## Central West Justice Center

AN AFFILIATE OF COMMUNITY LEGAL AID

10%

increase in immigration cases in 2020 compared to FY 2019

CWJC receives no funding from the Legal Services Corporation.



### CLIENT CASE

## Helping Children

“Roseline” fled to the United States with her young children immediately following the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010. She and her family settled in Massachusetts near the children’s grandmother, “Esther.” Roseline’s children enrolled in local schools, and the family thrived in their new home.

STAFF ATTORNEY  
KELLY MORGAN

Sadly, eight years later, Roseline suffered a stroke and passed away, leaving her children without a guardian. In the wake of this tragedy, their grandmother Esther stepped in to take custody of the children. She then realized that the children had never obtained lawful immigration status in the United States. As the children were very young when they fled Haiti, they had little memory of the country and did not speak the language. Solidifying the children’s immigration status became a priority for Esther.

Esther reached out to the Central West Justice Center for help. Attorney Kelly Morgan met with the family and recommended that the children apply for a type of immigration relief reserved for children in the country without parents – Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Attorney Morgan accepted their cases, and today, all three children have successfully obtained Lawful Permanent Residency. The oldest daughter is now in her first year of college and recently reflected upon what her new immigration status means to her: “To me, a green card represents security, knowing that I’m no longer in constant danger of deportation or not being able to get a job because of my status. The green card is the key that opens all these doors. Thank you, Attorney Morgan and CWJC!”

CWJC receives no funding from the Legal Services Corporation.

# Pro Bono Programs

Community Legal Aid’s pro bono programs greatly enhance our ability to provide access to justice for our clients. Through our programs, we refer hundreds of cases a year to attorneys working in private practice, corporations, and government. The cases are screened and then assigned to CLA Pro Bono staff who provide ongoing support to our volunteers.

## PRO BONO HONOR ROLL

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions our volunteers from the legal community have made to providing pro bono legal services to economically disadvantaged residents of Central and Western Massachusetts.

Karen A. Adamski  
Norma Adler  
Akosua Agyepong  
Tokumbo Akiubagu  
Lisa Alberto  
Abra Allexenberg  
Katherine E. Amato  
Robert A. Antonioni  
Laura F. Arbeitman  
Thomas Argenio  
Rhonda L. Bachrach  
James E. Baker  
Kenneth R. Barba  
Andrew Bartholomew  
David K. Bartley  
Michelle Begley  
Harris E. Berenson  
Burton F. Berg  
Gerald B. Berg  
Kayla Boehlen  
Maureen Booth  
Erin Bradbury  
Jennifer Breen  
Lucille B. Brennan  
Laurel E. Bretta

Terrence Briggs  
James T. Brown  
Edward C. Bryant Jr.  
Heather Budrewicz  
Jeffrey A. Burstein  
Colin Caffrey  
Kathryn Calo  
Linda T. Cammuso  
Mary Bermudez Camp  
Edward Carman  
Sergio Carvajal  
Brian Casaceli  
Stephen Chaplin  
Lance S. Chavin  
Lilian Chinenyenwa Chukwurah  
David R. Cianflone  
Bernard S. Cohen  
Lawrence Cohen  
J. Christopher Collins  
Joseph B. Collins  
Casey Connors  
Phyllis Cook  
Angelo Corrado  
Nyles L. Courchesne  
Katherine Coyne  
Paul M. Cranston  
Mark D. Cress  
Kathryn S. Crouss  
Jenny A. Daniell  
Diane M. DeGiacomo  
Marianne Desrosiers  
JulieAnn Dialessi-Lafley  
James F. Donnelly  
Christa Douaihy  
Anthony Dragga

James Edwards  
Joshua Egler  
John P. Elloian  
Charles J. Eusey  
Michele Feinstein  
Joel H. Feldman  
Paige Dunmire Firment  
Helena Friedman  
Christine A. Ford  
Terry M. Ford  
Kathryn Foster  
Christian Franklin  
Michael A. Frazee  
Robert A. George  
Tsvetelina Gerova-Wilson  
Melissa R. Gillis  
Gerald Glasser  
Stella Gnepp  
Jonathan R. Goldsmith  
Michael Gorman  
Mitchell Greenwald  
James F. Gregory  
Elizabeth Guerrero  
Carmine Gugliotti  
Elizabeth Halloran  
Carla A. Halpern  
Michael D. Hashim Jr.  
Deirdre Healy  
Hugh D. Heisler  
Brigid M. Hennessey  
Richard Herbert  
Holly H. Hines  
Andrew Hochberg  
Maegan Hurley  
Cristina M. Ianello


Tyler Ingraham  
Marie T. Jablonski  
Kathleen Jackson  
Robert Kilroy  
Abigail Kline  
Kelly Koch  
Leah Kofos  
Eric D. Kornblum  
Robert W. Kovacs Jr.  
Stephen N. Krevalin  
Jonathan LaBonte  
Talia K. Landry  
Jennifer Lauro  
Nicole Reeves Lavallee  
Maren Law  
Darren Lee  
Mark Twombly Lee  
Gina Letellier  
Yifeng Lu  
Beth A. Lux  
Dawn M. MacKinnon  
Timothy Macri  
Glynis MacVeety  
Raquel Manzanares  
Thomas Martin  
Thomas J. McCormick  
Samantha P. McDonald  
Xai McDonald  
Nadia R. Totino McGourthy  
Wendy M. Mead  
Erin Meehan  
Norka Michelen  
Katherine L. Milligan  
Carolyn Metzger Mitchell  
Jason Moore  
Mark Morisi  
William J. Morrissey  
Sheila Mulholland  
Brian Murphy  
Brian W. Murray  
Elizabeth Myska  
Carrie Naatz  
Lisa M. Neeley  
AiVi Nguyen  
David M. Nickless  
Patrick Nicoletti  
Diane L. Nolli  
Andrea O’Connor  
Kathleen O’Malley  
Dan Ordorica  
Craig Ornell

Robert Osol  
David W. Ostrander  
Kathleen F. O’Sullivan  
Jaclyn S. Packard  
Stephen Pagnotta  
Mark A. Papirio  
Carolyn Pereira  
Jeremiah Pollard  
Vincent P. Pusateri  
Debora J. Queeney  
Nancy Ramos  
Henry B. Raphaelson  
Justin Raphaelson  
Nicole Reeves Lavallee  
Roger J. Reid  
Kara Rescia  
Regina Ressin  
David Rivera  
Maria Rivera-Cotto  
Caroline Robillard  
Louis S. Robin  
Judith Rosenberg  
Benjamin C. Rudolf  
Mary Samberg  
Howard Sasson  
Matthew Schoen  
Carolyn E. Scott-Howe  
Alan Sharpe  
Jennifer Sharrow

Kerri Shaughnessy  
John A. Shea  
Richard Sheils Jr.  
Jonathan Sigel  
Alison Silber  
Sean Smith  
Stephen A. Smith  
Samuel Stauffer  
Walter H. Stowell  
Peter Sturgeon  
Stanley A. Szlachetka  
Fred T. Thompson  
Kathryn Toomey  
Nathaniel A. Tripp  
Paige M. Vaillancourt  
Dorothy Varon  
Diana S. Velez-Harris  
Tom G. Vukmirovits  
Reid Wakefield  
Brian Waller  
Gary M. Weiner  
Jeffrey S. Weisser  
James A. Whitbeck  
Susan M. Williams  
Hon. Geoffrey Wilson (Ret.)  
Thomas N. Wilson  
Alyson C. Yorlano  
Mark I. Zarrow

**PRO BONO YEAR IN NUMBERS**  
10/1/19 – 9/30/20


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648

**CASES REFERRED TO PRO BONO ATTORNEYS**


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195

**VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS** donated their time and service to help our most vulnerable community members meet their legal needs.

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2,131

**HOURS OF SERVICE**

that's a value of over \$390,105.

# Pro Bono Spotlights

## ATTORNEY ABRA C. ALLEXENBERG



Pro Bono Attorney Abra C. Allexenberg helped a young UMass Memorial patient obtain the critical educational

services he needed due to his unique developmental needs.

“Joshua” suffered from depression, anxiety, and a traumatic childhood. In school, his mood disorder made it difficult for him to communicate effectively with his teachers and peers, and school administrators were seeking to suspend him due to these difficulties.

Joshua’s mother reached out to CLA for assistance with obtaining services to support Joshua’s special needs. CLA referred the case to Attorney Allexenberg who worked with Joshua’s mother to obtain a psychiatric evaluation for Joshua and a revised education plan addressing Joshua’s needs. She also assisted the family in connecting with a Vocational Rehabilitation Coordinator for Transition Planning. Joshua now has near perfect attendance and is staying on track with his educational goals.

Attorney Allexenberg contributed many pro bono hours to this case and checks in frequently with Joshua’s mother to confirm that his educational services and Transition Planning are both on track. This attorney’s dedication and commitment to this family has allowed them to not only feel comfortable voicing their concerns, but also empowered to advocate for Joshua’s rights.

## ATTORNEY J. CHRISTOPHER COLLINS

Recently, a UMass Memorial medical provider referred a 29-year-old man who suffered from numerous serious medical conditions to CLA. The patient, “Mr. Taylor,” had applied for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for his disability, but his application was denied. As a result, he was struggling financially and felt he had nowhere to turn. CLA referred the case to Attorney J. Christopher Collins of **Mirick O’Connell** who agreed to represent Mr. Taylor pro bono in filing an appeal with the Social Security Administration (SSA).

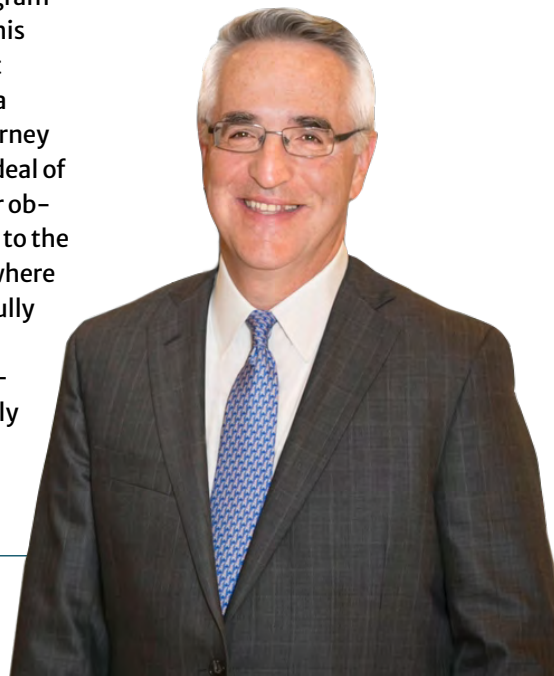
Attorney Collins spent many hours meeting with Mr. Taylor, reviewing the facts, and performing legal research. In one meeting, Mr. Taylor said that he needed to start an exercise program focused on addressing his medical conditions, but that he couldn’t afford a gym membership. Attorney Collins exerted a great deal of effort to help Mr. Taylor obtain a free membership to the local Worcester YMCA where he was able to successfully begin a swim program.

Attorney Collins continued to work diligently

“This was one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career.”

J. CHRISTOPHER COLLINS

on this case and represented Mr. Taylor at an appeal hearing with SSA. In January of 2020, Attorney Collins received the decision awarding Mr. Taylor full SSI benefits, as well as retroactive benefits dating back to 2017. Attorney Collins reflected, “This was one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career.”



# 2020 Racial Justice Institute



Four CLA advocates participated in the 2020 Racial Justice Institute, a leadership program organized by the Shriver Center on Poverty Law. The Institute is a ground-breaking program designed to train anti-poverty advocates to affirmatively advance racial equity. The training will help CLA’s staff tackle issues stemming from structural racism and inequity which harm the communities where we live and work.

- 1 **Nina Harrison**, Racial Justice Fellow
- 2 **Alyssa Golden**, Staff Attorney, Re-Entry/Housing Project
- 3 **Daniel Bahls**, Staff Attorney, Housing Unit and Veterans Medical-Legal Partnership and
- 4 **Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies**, Managing Attorney of CLA’s Worcester and Fitchburg Offices

The training will help CLA’s staff tackle issues stemming from structural racism and inequity which harm the communities where we live and work.

## Dear Friends,

In a year like no other, when many of us have hardly had a moment to take a breath, I wanted to take the time to offer my personal thanks to the many friends, staff, and supporters that make up the CLA community.

The issues CLA clients face are many – housing, employment, education, disability rights, abuse, unstable income – and all were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The calls for a renewed focus on racial justice in our country were also deeply felt by our community.

In the face of these many challenges, CLA staff rose to the occasion and handled more than 7,200 cases impacting an estimated 18,000 individuals in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire, and Worcester counties. I am grateful for the hard work, resilience, and dedication the CLA team brought to work each and every day.

I am also profoundly thankful for the exceptional levels of support shown by our community partners and our donors, who are listed on the following pages. Your wonderful generosity is a testament to your deep understanding of the unique challenges our neighbors faced in 2020.

Thank you for supporting the work of Community Legal Aid as it strives to make equal justice a reality for low-income and elderly residents of Central and Western Massachusetts.



Sincerely,

Todd Rodman  
President  
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 2020 Access to Justice Campaign, which began on October 1, 2019, and ran through the spring of 2020, raised over \$130,000 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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# Funders

A growing number of foundations, corporations, and other organizations are recognizing the importance of ensuring a fair and just civil legal process by providing grants in support of Community Legal Aid. Thank you to all of these institutions whose generosity and partnership are essential to our mission of justice for all.

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Greater Worcester Community Foundation	WestMass ElderCare
Hampden County Legal Clinic	Williamstown Community Chest
Harry H. Dow Memorial Legal Assistance Fund	Worcester County Food Bank



## SPEAKING THEIR LANGUAGE

CLA prides itself on serving the legal needs of a diverse range of clients, reflected in the broad array of linguistic needs presented by CLA's clients. Annually, CLA serves approximately 1,000 clients who primarily speak a language other than English, including: Spanish, Portuguese, Somali, Arabic, Nepali, French, Albanian, Vietnamese, Karen, Swahili, Haitian Creole, Amharic, Korean, Kirundi, Farsi, Polish, Russian, Khmer, Twi, Chinese, and American Sign Language. When these clients seek assistance from CLA, the need for professional, competent translation and interpretation services is essential.

With the generous support of the following funders, CLA can ensure that all of our clients are provided with a safe and professional way to have their stories heard, and their lawyers can be confident that they are crafting advocacy strategies based on full and accurate information.

Avidia Charitable Foundation	People's United Community Foundation
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### CLIENT CASE



## Professional Interpretation Services

"Amara" was born in Iraq and moved to Worcester with her son in 2013. As a senior citizen with disabilities, she relied on her son as her in-home aide and to help her manage her affairs. The Social Security Administration (SSA) alleged that Amara had been overpaid and demanded that she repay benefits she had received. SSA did not provide Amara or her son with information clear enough for them to understand how or why she had been overpaid.

Amara and her son attempted to resolve the matter at their local office and again before an Administrative Law Judge. In both resolution attempts, they were not provided with competent Arabic interpreters.

Using the interpretation services provided through the Language Access Project, CLA Attorney Rachel Brown represented Amara in appealing her Administrative Law Judge decision and later in the new hearing she was granted. Ultimately, SSA determined that Amara had not, in fact, been overpaid, and therefore did not owe money to SSA. The final decision on Amara's case also emphasized the importance of SSA following its policy to provide an interpreter when a claimant requests one or it is evident that a claimant needs one.

# Donors

Thank you to our Fiscal Year 2020 donors. The list below recognizes gifts received between October 1, 2019 and September 30, 2020.

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.

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## DONOR SPOTLIGHT



**Peter Benjamin** has had a long and impressive career in legal services in Western Massachusetts. Involved with legal aid since 1979, he previously served as an Elder Law Attorney, Managing Attorney, and now as CLA's Advocacy Coordinator. His career has certainly made a mark on legal aid and on countless residents of Western Massachusetts who have benefited from legal assistance over the years.

Peter and his wife Elizabeth Bramson, a clinical social worker, are making sure that the mark they leave is indelible. They have established a fund at the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts to provide charitable support to CLA in perpetuity. We are so grateful for Peter's outstanding advocacy over the years and for the generosity and foresight that he and Liz have shown in setting up this fund. When asked about creating the fund, Peter and Liz said, "Nonprofit organizations play an extraordinarily important role in our community, and we are fortunate to be able to support a few that are especially close to our hearts, CLA among them. There is great satisfaction in knowing that we will be helping these agencies to survive and hopefully thrive far into the future."

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

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**CY PRES AWARD**

Community Legal Aid was delighted to be chosen by the Law Office of Nicholas F. Ortiz (Boston) to receive a \$22,734 *cy pres* award to support its work on behalf of low-income and elderly residents. A *cy pres* award is a court-approved distribution of money from a class action settlement to a selected charitable organization. Attorney Ortiz had settled a wage theft class action lawsuit against a home-care agency based in Hampden County, resulting in the *cy pres* award. He reflected, “Community Legal Aid does important work in Western and Central Massachusetts in a variety of areas and is a logical choice for a *cy pres* award. I am pleased to direct these funds to CLA and contribute to its efforts to improve the lives of our most vulnerable citizens through legal advocacy.”

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 Jo Valens  
 Rebekah Vineyard  
 Reid Wakefield  
 Nina Walsh  
 L. Mark Watkins  
 Timothy Webster  
 Ronald Weiss\*  
 Welch Law Offices  
 Karl Wurst and Amy West  
 Thomas Wilson  
 Eric Wirth  
 Paul Wondolowski\*  
 Emilee Wyner

**IS YOUR NAME MISSING?**  
 The 2020 Community Report recognizes donations made between October 1, 2019 and September 30, 2020. 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 their family, friend, or colleague.

## GIFTS IN HONOR

**In Honor of Mrs. Gingras, Ms. Pease, and Ms. Campbell at Becket Washington Elementary School**  
Victoria Templeton Bleier

**In Honor of Wendy Berg**  
Shelley Steuer

**In Honor of David Bloomberg**  
Leonard Jekanowski

**In Honor of Charles Casartello Jr.**  
Hon. Philip Contant (Ret.)

**In Honor of Thomas Francis Casey Jr.**  
Patricia Casey

**In Honor of Linda Cavaioi**  
George Balko III

**In Honor of Lucy Delacour**  
Benjamin Barnes

**In Honor of Richard Dearborn**  
Stillman Family Fund of Greater Worcester Community Foundation

**In Honor of Mark Gold**  
A Better Community (ABC)  
Bernard Pinsonnault and Dianne Cutillo

**In Honor of Gloria Herbert**  
Phyllis Hanlon

**In Honor of Martin Kallio**  
Jerold Paquette

**In Honor of Wendy Kane**  
Shelley Steuer

**In Honor of Peter Klein**  
Randi Klein and Scott Barton

**In Honor of Patrick Markey**  
James and Elaine Tourtelotte

**In Honor of Donald R. Mahan**  
Jean Mahan

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

**In Honor of Ray Mestre**  
Sora Kim

**In Honor of Gale Nigrosh**  
Robert Sakakeeny

**In Honor of Faye Rachlin**  
Sally Gottesman

**In Honor of Todd Rodman**  
Robert Adler  
Ascher Maclean

**In Honor of Watson**  
James Smith

## GIFTS IN MEMORIAM

**In Memory of Davis McCormick Abbott**  
Jonathan Abbott

**In Memory of Russell Bath**  
Lawrence Cohen

**In Memory of J. Clifford Clarkson**  
John Busbin

**In Memory of Michael Dyer**  
Lawrence Cohen  
Hon. Patrick Fox (Ret.)

**In Memory of Herb Epstein**  
Valerie Fisk

**In Memory of George Floyd**  
William Butler

**In Memory of Bart Gordon**  
Hon. Michael Ponsor (Ret.)

**In Memory of E. Bayard Halsted**  
Alice Halsted

**In Memory of Paul Kallil**  
Amy Bricker

**In Memory of Norman Kunitz**  
Michele Kunitz and Anthony Tuck

**In Memory of Leonard**  
Richard and Elizabeth Gaberman

**In Memory of Jeffrey Luekens**  
Michael T. Luekens

**In Memory of Mary Monica Miner**  
Susan Elsen

**In Memory of Paul O'Brien**  
Lawrence Cohen

**In Memory of Dorothy A. Pacillo Riggieri**  
Lawrence Cohen

**In Memory of Philip J. Tarpey**  
Kathleen Breck

**In Memory of Jane Trigere**  
Kenneth Schoen

**In Memory of Hon. William T. Walsh**  
Paul Schneider

**In Memory of John A. Wickstrom**  
Elizabeth and Charles Morse  
Wickstrom Morse, LLP



## REMEMBERING A COLLEAGUE

In June of 2020, CLA lost a dear friend and colleague, Michael Dyer. Mike joined CLA in 2017 as a Pro Bono Coordinator in our Worcester office. He quickly became an invaluable member of our Pro Bono Team as well as our organization. His caring nature, kindness, generosity, and positive outlook also made him a friend to many of our staff. He is deeply missed by his colleagues, members of the bar, and all who knew him.

# Our Team

## CLA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(as of September 30, 2020)

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Seder & Chandler, LLP

### TREASURER

Jodi K. Miller, Esq.  
Bulkley, Richardson & Gelinas, LLP

### VICE PRESIDENT

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Storrow Law Offices

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Guinevere Vanhorne  
Client Representative

Denisse Verdiguel  
Client Representative

Danielle L. Williams, Esq.  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts Trial Court

Community Legal Aid thanks outgoing board members Robert Cox Jr. of Bowditch & Dewey, Eric J. Gouvin of Western New England University School of Law, Jonathan R. Sigel of Mirick O'Connell, and Livia González.

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

# CLA Staff

## COUNTING MILESTONES

Several members of the CLA family celebrated major milestones in their legal aid careers:

# 35

Deputy Director **Faye Rachlin** (Worcester) and Receptionist **Judy McLellan** (Springfield) both celebrated 35 years of service with legal aid.

# 40

Senior Paralegal **Wendy Kane** (Northampton) celebrated 40 years of service with legal aid.

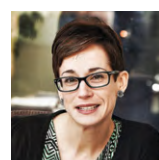
# 45

Receptionist **Mildred Otero** (Springfield), celebrated 45 years of service with legal aid.



(as of September 30, 2020)

Jonathan Mannina <i>Executive Director</i>	Alyssa Golden	Susan O'Connor
Marina Abraham	Carmen Gonzalez	Kimberly Ortega
Daniel Bahls	Shelika Gonzalez	Mildred Otero
Peter Benjamin	Joshua Gutierrez	Meredith Palmer
Hallie Blashfield	J. Michelle Hamill	Christina Paradiso
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David Brown	Nina Harrison	Faye Rachlin
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Raydi Fonfrias-Soto	Cory Mescon	Amanda Winalski
Franci Gazzaniga	Ray Mestre	Leigh Woodruff
Hon. Edward Ginsburg (Ret.)	Claribel Morales	Judy Zeh
	Michael Morelli	Ashley Zink
	Thomas Navin	
	Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies	



**Corrine Ryan** was named the new Managing Attorney of CLA's Springfield office. In this position, Attorney Ryan oversees CLA's operations throughout Hampden County. Attorney Ryan succeeded **Hisham Leil**, who has transitioned to a new position within CLA as Director of Technology.

# CWJC Team

## BOARD OF MANAGERS

**Michael Badger, Esq.**  
Badger Legal Group, Westborough

**Charles R. Casartello Jr., Esq.**  
Pellegrini, Seeley, Ryan & Blakesley PC, Springfield

## STAFF

(As of Sept. 30, 2020)

Leticia Medina-Richman  
*Director*

Catherine Ady-Bell

Elizabeth Alfred

Victoria Baratian

Alexandra Bonazoli

Valdir Cabral

Karen Cole

Hannah Eash-Gates

Claudia Folgosa

Marion Hohn

Mary Johnson

Blair Komar

Amanda Montel

Donna Morelli

Kelly Morgan

Jose Gabriel Otero

Gina Plata-Nino

Claudia Quintero

Hilary Thrasher

Ellen VanScoyoc

*CWJC receives no funding from the Legal Services Corporation*



## AMERICORPS

CLA is proud to celebrate its 15<sup>th</sup> year of hosting AmeriCorps members. Each year, CLA hosts between four and six college or law school graduates. CLA hosted four AmeriCorps members in 2019-2020, and three continued for a second year of service. In addition, CLA hired one AmeriCorps member, Claribel Morales, to serve as a fair housing attorney in Springfield.

*Pictured above L-R: Sarah Bluestein, Claribel Morales, Caitlyn Schubert, Eun Sol Sara Lee, & Shannon Herman*

# Financials

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Community Legal Aid and Affiliate Statement of Activities For the Twelve Months Ending September 30, 2020

## REVENUE

Federal Government Grants	\$3,538,348
State & Local	\$6,560,641
Foundation Grants	\$806,810
Private Fundraising	\$211,513
United Way Grants	\$153,601
Attorneys' Fees	\$174,537
Cy Pres Awards	\$22,735
Other Income	\$295,520
<b>Revenue Before Donated Services</b>	<b>\$11,763,705</b>
<b>Donated Services – Attorneys</b>	<b>\$390,105</b>
<b>Total Revenue After Donated Services</b>	<b>\$12,153,810</b>

## EXPENSES BY LINE-ITEM

Personnel	\$9,715,730
Occupancy	\$710,757
Operations	\$619,448
Library & Litigation	\$48,453
Sub-grants	\$40,312
Contract Services	\$209,191
<b>Expenses Before Donated Services</b>	<b>\$11,343,891</b>
<b>Donated Services – Attorneys</b>	<b>\$390,105</b>
<b>Total Expenses After Donated Services</b>	<b>\$11,733,996</b>
Change In Net Assets	\$419,814





Community Legal Aid  
405 Main Street  
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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.

**Help Community Legal Aid continue to thrive by making a tax-deductible gift today.**

**GIVE ONLINE:**

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

**GIVE BY PHONE:**

(413) 727-7115  
(508) 425-2805

### 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**  
405 Main Street  
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

TTY/TDD 508-755-3260 | (855) CLA-LEGAL  
855-252-5342 | [www.communitylegal.org](http://www.communitylegal.org)

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