



FY14 Legislative Campaign Talking Points for the Private Bar

Introduction:

MLAC is pressing to obtain a \$3.5m increase in state funding for civil legal aid for Fiscal Year 2014. In support, the EJC is adopting a consistent, simple message for private attorneys to deliver. The message is comprised of the three points laid out below. Underneath each point are bulleted items that support the main argument. You may go into as much detail as you are comfortable discussing. The key is to make the main points. EJC and MLAC can provide whatever additional information any attorney or legislator requests.

In any discussion with a legislator or his or her staff, *we recommend you take the following simple approach:*

- a. Introduce yourself, tell them where you live and work.
- b. Thank your legislator for his or her past support.
- c. Explain that this issue is important to you as a constituent and say you want to make three brief points:
 1. **Legal aid lawyers make a critical difference for people in your district (constituents) and for the Commonwealth.**
 - Legal representation is critical to the fair and efficient administration of justice
 - People represented by a legal aid attorney are better prepared to argue their case in court, presenting claims and defenses that can make the difference between keeping or losing their home or critical benefits
 - Legal aid attorneys relieve courts of the crush of *pro se* litigants through direct representation of litigants and essential training and support of pro bono attorney volunteers
 - Legal aid attorneys secure federal benefits such as disability payments and food stamps, moving people off of state benefits and conserving precious state resources
 2. **The need for legal aid has never been greater.**

- The number of individuals and families eligible for civil legal aid continues to grow. In the past two years, the eligible population increased by 112,000 people (13%) to a total of 968,000.
- Legal aid programs are now forced to turn away at least half of the eligible people who request their help.

3. MLAC’s funding request is essential to avoid further layoffs and to allow these programs to meet their core mission

- **Due to a 78 percent decline in Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) revenue, a substantial increase in state funding is essential to avoid more layoffs and further service reductions.**
- IOLTA cuts have already resulted in devastating cuts to legal aid programs
- Due to program cuts and layoffs, some programs have been forced to stop doing housing work and other core services.
- The \$3.5 million increase will help restore the ability of legal aid programs to serve families and individuals in your district.
- This money will save lives, homes and money for the commonwealth.

For more information, visit www.equaljusticecoalition.org

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