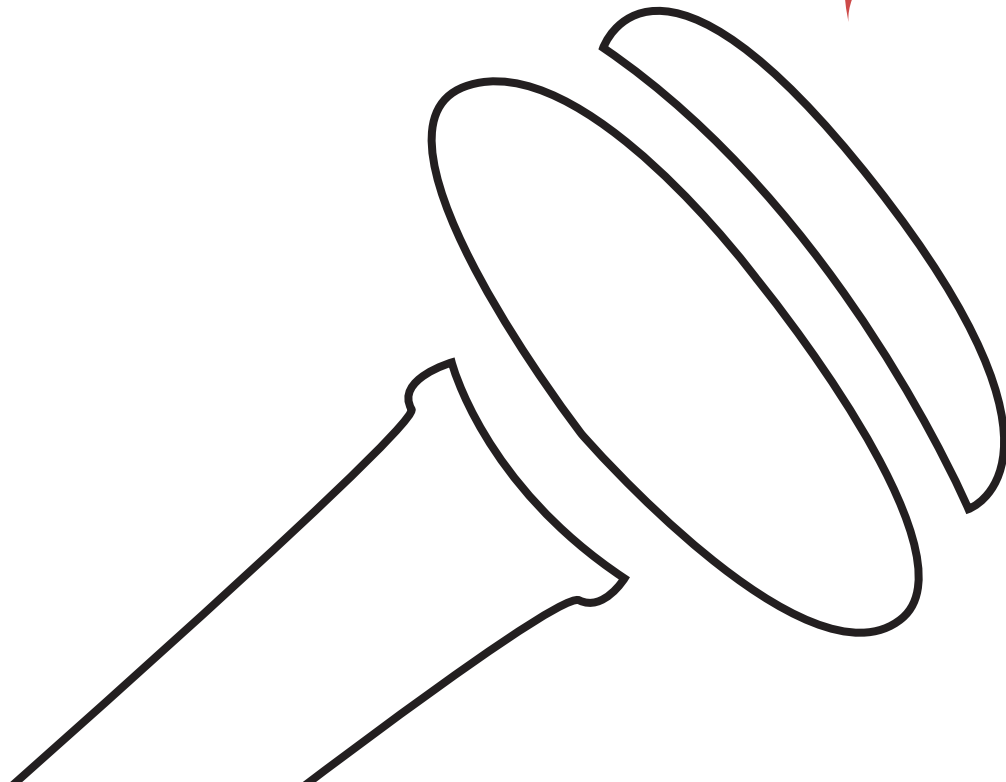


Greater Boston Legal Services
2009 Annual Report



...and justice for all

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Our Mission

The mission of Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) is to provide high-quality legal representation in civil (noncriminal) matters to as many low-income individuals and families as possible in the greater Boston area.

GBLS is the primary provider of free civil legal assistance to poor people living in the City of Boston and the 31 surrounding cities and towns. GBLS is the oldest and largest legal services program in New England and is considered a national leader for its legal work. Its roots can be traced to 1900 and the founding of the Boston Legal Aid Society (BLAS). GBLS was formed in 1976 by the merger of BLAS and the Boston Legal Assistance Project.

For Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) and its clients, 2009 was a very tough year. We continued to grapple with a severe financial crisis caused by the recession and deep funding cuts that first hit us in 2008. In response, we implemented a furlough program resulting in reduced staff salaries, made cuts to non-personnel expenses, and aggressively fundraised which resulted in preserving 10 positions for 2010. Despite these efforts, GBLS had no choice but to reduce its permanent program-wide staff by 15 positions in the last quarter of 2009, while the need for legal assistance continued to grow. The picture below was taken in the reception area of our Boston office on a typical Monday morning, as many people headed to our weekly housing clinic.

Quite often, even before GBLS opens for business on any given week day, a long line of people has formed. They seek GBLS' help to retain their housing, obtain inappropriately-denied unemployment benefits and training, obtain or retain their health insurance and drug prescription coverage—some of the basic necessities of life—as well as to address numerous other matters of basic justice.



Credit | Linda Lank

The news in 2009 was not all bad, however. Our advocates achieved several important systemic advocacy victories that will benefit thousands of low-income greater Boston residents, many of whom are dealing with losing their jobs and/or their homes. Two of these achievements follow.

Extension of unemployment benefits | Employment Unit Lead Attorney Monica Halas' intensive advocacy effort with both the Patrick administration and the leadership of the Legislature brought about a change in the law governing unemployment benefits that could bring an estimated \$650,000,000 in federal benefits to the state by extending unemployment benefits for the 85,000 unemployed residents of the state.

Preservation of affordable housing in Massachusetts | GBLS attorneys drafted the language of an affordable housing bill that was signed into law in November 2009 by Governor Patrick. "An Act Preserving Publicly Assisted Housing" will provide a critical tool to help preserve thousands of units of low-income housing by allowing the state to purchase affordable housing before its subsidy expires. This new bill will positively affect the lives of thousands of families and individuals, including many who are elderly or disabled across the Commonwealth. GBLS attorneys took a leadership role by representing local community organizations in drafting the legislation as part of a coalition of Massachusetts agencies and community and advocacy groups who worked tirelessly on this legislation.

Prior to passage of this bill, each year Massachusetts would lose thousands of units of previously-created affordable housing to the private market. Families lost the chance to live in safe areas of the city where there are good schools and access to public transportation and were forced to find private housing wherever it was available, often in poorly-maintained housing in deteriorated neighborhoods.

More positive news is that GBLS provided legal assistance for over 16,800 matters for its low-income clients in 2009, using its financial reserves to keep client services at the highest level possible. All those who came to us for help were facing very tough situations exacerbated by the recession and included the “new poor”: people formerly earning moderate incomes who were laid off and unable to find new jobs, and were for the first time in their lives forced to rely on public assistance to survive. Following are the broad range of issues with which GBLS’ legal advocates assisted clients, and the number of people overall (clients and household members) we estimate received assistance.

<p>49,115 <i>Number Assisted</i> <small>(based on estimated number of people impacted per case)</small></p>	<p><i>Legal Matters</i></p>
<p>14,696 <i>Housing</i></p>	<p>preserving and creating long-term affordable units legal assistance to those at risk of becoming homeless representing groups that engage in community organizing helping people gain access to emergency shelter creation of new affordable units</p>
<p>8,432 <i>Family & Domestic Violence</i></p>	<p>restraining orders relocation legal counseling for victims fleeing batterers custody and safe visitation orders child support divorce and paternity actions</p>
<p>7,551 <i>Immigration</i></p>	<p>asylum claims for people fleeing political or gender-based persecution and violence in their own countries safe haven status humanitarian protection family reunification independent legal status for battered immigrant women and their children legal status for unaccompanied minors</p>
<p>5,874 <i>Employment</i></p>	<p>unpaid wages or overtime, enforcement of minimum wage unemployment insurance and related training and health insurance benefits abuse and discrimination in the work place access to and funding for job training family and medical leave tax controversies</p>
<p>4,019 <i>Income Maintenance</i></p>	<p>protections for families with disabled parents or children obtaining and retaining cash assistance for families and other issues under the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependant Children rules and procedures child care benefits for low-income parents welfare recipient access to education and training needed to qualify for viable jobs equal access to programs for persons with limited English proficiency obtaining and retaining food stamps obtaining and retaining cash assistance, and other issues under the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children program welfare-related services and protections for domestic violence survivors and families with disabled parents or children</p>

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<p>2,650 <i>Social Security & SSI Benefits</i></p>	<p>obtaining and retaining benefits</p>
<p>2,517 <i>Health</i></p>	<p>access to health care including Medicare and related benefits, government disability benefits, public transportation, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), MassHealth and other public health programs assisting disabled individuals who want and are able to return to work</p>
<p>1,970 <i>Consumer</i></p>	<p>credit card debt credit rating adjustments outstanding loans insurance policies mortgage foreclosure</p>
<p>208 <i>Education</i></p>	<p>threats and assaults on school grounds tuition debt collection expulsion</p>
<p>1,198 <i>Miscellaneous</i></p>	<p>other matters not listed above</p>

Among the thousands of people GBLS helped to retain their housing in 2009 are “Wallace Brown” and his family. Mr. Brown and his family were reliable tenants whose apartment became infested by mice while Mr. Brown’s partner was pregnant with their second child. Mr. Brown was able to convince the landlord to transfer them to another building. Then, in an all-too-common scenario during these tough times, disaster struck: Mr. Wallace, a union laborer, was laid off from his job and couldn’t keep up with the \$1,200 rent. Although he had always paid the rent on time previously, the landlord was not understanding and would not come to an agreement with Mr. Brown until he could get back on his feet. The landlord brought an eviction case for non-payment of rent against Mr. Brown.

Thankfully, due to GBLS’ outreach efforts as part of its Quincy District Court pilot project that provides representation of low-income tenants facing eviction who otherwise would not have the assistance of a lawyer, Mr. Brown knew he could turn to GBLS for help. His GBLS attorney not only was successful in getting the eviction dismissed, she obtained for the family a rent credit of \$1,800 to be used for future rent. Then, she connected Mr. Brown with Quincy Community Action Programs, Inc. for assistance for his family through the federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). In addition to obtaining funds to cover some of the back rent, HPRP is also providing an ongoing rental subsidy as long as the clients’ circumstances continue to make them eligible. Without GBLS’ assistance, this family could have ended up in shelter or on the streets.

Dorchester resident Carolyn Leary was one of thousands of laid-off workers GBLS helped to obtain the unemployment benefits to which they're entitled. Ms. Leary worked full time for four years as a customer service agent at a hospital. Her pre-school age son who has asthma, was able to attend a full-day child care program while she was at work. When he was set to begin school in the fall, the childcare ended and Carolyn did not have anyone who could care for her son while she was at work. After an attempt to arrange an alternative schedule with her employer failed, she lost her job because she could not keep her hours.



Carolyn immediately began looking for a part-time job that would allow her to look after her son while supporting her family. In the meantime, she applied for unemployment assistance. Her application was denied. The Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) had a regulation that denied benefits to anyone who was seeking a part-time job after a history of full-time employment. This regulation had a disproportionate impact on single working mothers who have to juggle employment and child care.

Carolyn came to GBLS and met with an employment attorney. GBLS knew about the regulation and its effect on working mothers, and together Carolyn and her attorney challenged the DUA regulation. It was a long and difficult battle ending in court, but Carolyn persevered. The Superior Court invalidated the regulation, and Carolyn was able to receive unemployment assistance while she looked for a new job. She is now happily employed at a health center near her home and her son's school, and she is proud that her case will benefit other working mothers and their families.

Employment Law Unit client Carolyn Leary.

GBLS was able to help thousands of individuals like Mr. Brown and Ms. Leary along with their families because of our many supporters—like you. Individuals, including donors like David and Cynthia Phelan whose profile follows, law firms and foundations, the United Way and government agencies all contributed to ensuring that GBLS was there to help, to provide the critical legal assistance needed to secure some of the most basic necessities of life.

Credit | Kevin Decker

David and Cynthia Phelan have been generous supporters of GBLS since David became Executive Vice-President and General Counsel of State Street Corporation. David was familiar with GBLS because State Street and WilmerHale, where he previously practiced, have been long-standing institutional supporters. As General Counsel, David decided to join the GBLS Board of Directors, becoming one of a growing number of corporate counsel on the GBLS board who are working to increase support among all sectors of the legal community to ensure that poor people have an advocate when they need one to assert their legal rights.

“GBLS is a good fit for me and what I like to support,” says David. Like most lawyers, he is a great believer in the value of the legal system to individuals, recognizing the fundamental importance of having advocates for people who are trying to operate within the system but need help navigating the complexities of laws and regulations.

David and his wife, Dr. Cynthia Phelan, make their charitable giving decisions together, so GBLS also needed “to match up to our collective interests” in issues that impact on women and children, for example, which resonate with them as professionals and parents. Since 73% of GBLS clients are women — most of them parents — struggling with domestic violence, a lack of affordable housing, and low-paying jobs that don’t provide health care or paid sick days, GBLS did indeed match up.

David and Cynthia met in Providence while they were students. They moved to New Orleans when David attended Tulane School of Law and Cynthia began her career as an educator. She later also taught in New York City and is now is a professor of education at Regis College. Teaching in urban communities gave Dr. Phelan insight into the anxieties and challenges that women face trying to raise children in impoverished circumstances. She was aware of how poor families are greatly affected by the highly regulated bureaucracies that shape their daily lives. As just one example, she noted that her students’ mothers often “didn’t know their children had a legal right to a speedy assessment [for special needs]”, something that had far-reaching implications for their education and indeed, for the rest of their lives.

As a result, David didn’t find it difficult to convince Cynthia that GBLS was the right organization for them to support. They both were raised to “give back”, which has guided both their professional choices and their charitable decisions. GBLS is honored by their support and the difference they have chosen to make in the lives of our clients.



David and Cynthia Phelan.
Photo furnished by the Phelans

The generous gifts of our donors and the support of our institutional funders were critical to ensuring GBLS could continue providing client services at as high a level as possible in 2009 while addressing a severe deficit. Our 2009 financial statement shows the crisis GBLS is dealing with—a deficit of more than \$1.4 million at the end of the year.

<i>INCOME</i>	2009	2008
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation	3,502,847	7,140,387
Law Firms & Attorneys	3,064,124	3,020,349
Cy Pres Awards	58,864	30,182
Foundations/Corporations	2,240,284	1,565,902
Other Government Grants	1,010,148	836,810
Individual Contributions	841,049	553,656
United Way of Massachusetts Bay & Merrimack Valley	482,136	546,969
Elder Services	461,986	474,856
Investment Income	318,923	331,717
Miscellaneous	399,094	151,744
Law School Support	238,650	236,800
Attorney Fees	519,289	311,925
TOTAL INCOME BEFORE DONATED SERVICES	13,137,394	15,201,297
DONATED SERVICES	5,260,933	3,849,725
TOTAL INCOME	18,398,327	19,051,022

<i>EXPENSES</i>	2009	2008
Personnel:		
Lawyers	5,830,134	5,599,688
Non-Lawyers	3,555,559	3,706,627
Fringe Benefits	2,827,914	2,823,486
SUBTOTAL	12,231,607	12,129,801
Operating:		
Space & Utilities	434,147	418,204
Office & Related	337,045	417,757
Contract Services	895,612	892,326
Library	141,788	166,758
Client Litigation Expenses	214,585	169,217
Travel & Training	87,637	146,702
Miscellaneous	197,105	238,653
Transfer To Capital Or Endowment	30,000	53,282
SUBTOTAL	2,307,919	2,502,899
TOTAL EXPENSES	14,551,526	14,632,700
BEFORE DONATED SERVICES		
DONATED SERVICES	5,260,993	3,849,725
TOTAL EXPENSES	19,812,459	18,482,425
OPERATING SURPLUS	-1,414,132	568,597
CUMULATIVE OPERATING NET ASSETS	4,669,246	6,083,378

Please help us to get the word out about the work we do, as the agency people turn to when all other doors have closed. We need you, our supporters, to tell your friends, your family members, your colleagues, your legislators about the difference we make in the lives the poor who have been denied the rights and benefits to which they are entitled. We are doing everything we can to maintain our level of service to clients and save positions but cannot do this without your help.

THANK YOU!

PLEASE HELP SUPPORT OUR CLIENT SERVICES. Make a donation online.

Visit us at www.gbls.org, and click on Donate.

Legal Community Donors

The legal community demonstrates a special commitment to GBLs and its mission of ensuring access to justice regardless of income. Every year individual attorneys, law firms, and corporate law departments show the extent to which they respect and value the legal assistance GBLs provides to impoverished residents of greater Boston. Their support is provided in a variety of ways.

LAWYERS FUND DRIVE

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(\$700 or more per Boston attorney)

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Dechert LLP

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LAW FIRM FELLOWSHIPS

In addition to their 2009 Lawyers Fund Drive contribution, the following firms provided funding to support the salaries of GBLS attorneys.

Goodwin Procter
Ropes & Gray
Skadden
WilmerHale

DEFERRED/LOANED ASSOCIATE FELLOWSHIPS

In addition to their 2009 Lawyers Fund Drive contribution, the following firms provided law firm associates to work full time at GBLS.

Foley Hoag LLP
Goodwin Procter
Ropes & Gray
Skadden
WilmerHale



Credit | John Kennard

A cocktail reception and awards ceremony celebrated the end of the 2009 Associates Drive in June 2009.

MATCHING GIFTS – ASSOCIATES’ DRIVE

Donations were matched by the firms or by individual partners.

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* Indicates donation to one of the endowment funds

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The following individuals, in addition to a number of law students, volunteered substantial commitments of time in 2009 to GBLS and its clients. Their service, as reported in the Financial Statement, was valued at \$5,260,933. We are also very grateful to the many *pro bono* attorneys who handled GBLS cases at their firms, too numerous to list here.

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Pro bono attorney John Besser giving his acceptance speech for the Southgate Volunteer Award, at GBLs' 2009 Annual Meeting.

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