

Access to Justice

Every day, GBLS attorneys and paralegals provide critical legal advice and representation to low-income individuals. In addition, thousands of other poor families and individuals benefit from the systemic advocacy GBLS carries out on behalf of its clients. A few examples include:

- Increased safety for battered women and their children thanks to improved laws governing custody, visitation, and restraining orders;
- Improved access to public transportation for thousands of individuals with disabilities, the result of a class action settlement with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority in April 2006 in which GBLS represented the plaintiffs;
- Improved protection for victims of political and gender-based persecution seeking asylum in the U.S.;
- Increased hourly wages for low-wage workers as a result of Boston's Living Wage Ordinance and Massachusetts' increased minimum wage;
- Improvement of the unemployment system for low-wage workers, non-English speaking claimants, and domestic violence survivors; and
- Long-term preservation of close to 3,000 units of affordable housing for the poor, elderly, and disabled, which were going to be converted to market-rate rents.

The Need

Despite all GBLS' extraordinary work, it is not enough. Every day, three out of five clients with legitimate claims are turned away due to a lack of staffing resources. These people, with meritorious legal claims, have nowhere else to turn to seek justice.

Areas of Work

GBLS provides critical legal assistance for many serious problems faced by poor families and individuals, including elders and the disabled. Major areas of work include:

Consumer Rights Unit – Community education and advocacy for low-income clients:

working to prevent foreclosures; initiating systemic challenges to predatory lending practices; representing clients in broader consumer law areas, including debt collection, unfair and deceptive consumer practices, and discriminatory race-based targeting of low-income consumers.

Employment – Protecting the rights of low-wage workers:

unemployment benefits; job training; wages (including minimum wage and overtime); family and medical leave; tax controversies; certified nurse aide appeals; and employment discrimination (in limited circumstances).

Family Law – Safety, security, financial independence:

representing primarily victims of domestic violence to secure their safety and that of their children; custody and visitation orders; child support; divorce; and paternity actions.

Health & Disability – Access to health care and disability benefits:

access to government disability benefits, health care, public transportation, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), MassHealth and other public health programs. A special *Medicare Advocacy Project* handles cases involving access to Medicare and related benefits. The *Children's Disability Project* represents children wrongfully denied Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and provides parents with information on applying for Special Education.

Housing – Preservation of affordable housing for low-income tenants:

obtaining and preserving shelter for homeless families; eviction defense; access to affordable housing; preservation of the existing stock of subsidized housing; and the creation of new affordable units.

Immigration – Protecting freedoms:

asylum claims for people fleeing their countries due to political or gender-based persecution; obtaining legal immigration status, independent of their abusers, for battered immigrant women and minors who are U.S. residents; and application assistance for various groups of immigrants offered special status under U.S. immigration laws.

Welfare – Preserving an income safety net and assisting the transition to work:

obtaining and retaining Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC), child care, food stamps, and Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC) benefits; access to education and training; and welfare-related services and protections for domestic violence survivors and families with disabled parents or children.

Special Programs

GBLS has several programs to ensure access to justice for people who face specific barriers. Many GBLS attorneys and paralegals speak Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Chinese and/or Vietnamese. GBLS provides interpreters in other languages as well. In addition, GBLS has created special programs to provide outreach and assistance to specific populations.

Asian Outreach Unit: provides outreach and legal assistance to Asian immigrants in the areas of family, immigration, employment, housing, and welfare law; and represents client groups in community empowerment initiatives involving immigrant rights, workers' rights, and affordable housing.

Elder Law Unit: provides outreach and legal assistance to people age 60 and older in the areas of housing and tenants' rights, nursing home issues, Social Security, SSI, Medicaid, food stamps, defense against guardianships and conservatorships, and consumer issues.

Mental Health and Disability Rights: provides legal assistance to adults and children with mental disabilities in such areas as discrimination, rights to mental health and other community-based services, institutional rights, and special education.

Re-Entry Project: works to reduce barriers to employment, housing, benefits, education and other opportunities denied to low-income clients with criminal records. The project will work to challenge laws and institutional practices that perpetuate discrimination against people with criminal records, particularly in communities of color.

If You Need Legal Help

You may be eligible for GBLS' services if you live within our service area and your income does not exceed 125% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines. (Elderly clients are not subject to the income guidelines.) We offer legal assistance ranging from advice to full representation, depending on need. Our staff is divided into units of legal expertise to best address the problems our clients face.

Contact Us

Offices:

Greater Boston Legal Services

197 Friend Street

Boston, MA 02114

Tel: 617.371.1234 Fax: 617.371.1222

TDD: 617.371.1228

Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services

60 Gore Street, Suite 203

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Tel: 617.603.2700 Fax: 617.494.8222

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www.gbls.org

Hablamos Español

Interpreters available for
non-English speakers.

Greater Boston Legal Services' Service Area



GBLS also serves elders in the following towns: Acton, Bedford, Boxborough, Burlington, Carlisle, Concord, Harvard, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, Maynard, North Reading, Reading, Stow, and Wilmington.

GBLS is able to serve its clients thanks to generous funding from the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation, the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, Area Agencies on the Aging, many foundations, corporations, and the generous contributions of individuals and law firms throughout the Boston area.

GBLS gratefully accepts donations, which are tax deductible. Please contact us.

GBLS is proud to be supported by




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LEGAL SERVICES

...and justice for all



Providing high-quality,

free civil (noncriminal)

legal assistance for

poor people in Greater Boston.