

Access to Justice

Every day, GBLS attorneys and paralegals provide critical legal advice and representation to low-income people. In addition, thousands of other Massachusetts families and individuals benefit from the systemic advocacy GBLS carries out. Some examples include:

- Extension of federal unemployment benefits for Massachusetts recipients, allowing them to continue on federal benefits rather than collect the lower state benefits;
- Increased protections for Massachusetts homeowners in foreclosure, and protections from eviction for Massachusetts tenants in foreclosed buildings;
- Improved access to quality health care for people with disabilities at two major Massachusetts hospitals;
- Preservation of thousands of units of low-income housing, including drafting the language of an affordable housing bill signed into law; and
- Greater protections from debt collectors for low-income debtors, including persons with disabilities and elders.

The Need

Despite all of GBLS' extraordinary work, it is not enough. Every day, three out of five potential clients with legitimate legal claims are turned away due to a lack of staffing resources, and they have nowhere else to turn to seek justice. Due to funding losses, since 2008 GBLS has had to eliminate 24 positions, further restricting our ability to help the poor.

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 – Advocacy and community education for low-income clients:

Focuses on issues related to the foreclosure crisis, engaging in legal work and advocacy aimed at preventing foreclosures, keeping low-income homeowners in their homes, and systemic challenges to predatory and discriminatory lending practices.

Elder, Health & Disability Unit – Protecting the rights of elders, preserving access to health care and disability benefits: Advocates on behalf of elders, people with disabilities, and families, promoting access to quality health care, Social Security or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) income, and affordable housing for elders. Works to keep people, especially elders, out of institutions and improve the quality of life for those who live in institutions. The *Medicare Advocacy Project* handles cases involving access to Medicare and related benefits. The *Children's Disability Project* represents children wrongfully denied SSI. The Unit's systemic advocacy priorities include guardianship reform, ensuring the rights of isolated nursing home residents, improving access to hospital and transportation services for people with disabilities, and ensuring access to health care for all age groups.

Employment – Protecting the rights of

low-wage workers: GBLS assists clients in cases involving: Wrongful denial of unemployment benefits; violations of wage laws resulting in wage theft; tax controversies related to employment income or problems receiving the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), through the Low-Income Taxpayer Assistance Project; and Criminal Offender Record Information-related barriers to employment, housing, benefits, education, and other opportunities. GBLS also advocates for changes to laws, rules, and regulations negatively affecting low-wage workers.

Family Law – Safety, security, financial

independence: GBLS provides legal assistance and representation to low-income victims of domestic violence (DV) to restore them and their children to an economically-sustainable life free of abuse. We address broader legal and public policy issues that perpetuate DV against victims and obstructs their road to physical and emotional well-being and economic independence.

Housing – Preservation of low-income housing:

GBLS prioritizes eviction defense cases, especially involving public and subsidized housing; helping low-income tenants gain access to and preserve access to affordable public and assisted housing; representing tenants and former owners of foreclosed properties; obtaining and preserving shelter for homeless families and helping them obtain permanent, affordable housing; advocating for DV victims to protect their housing options; and helping tenant associations understand housing policies and assisting in changing unfair policies.

Immigration – Protecting human rights: GBLS provides legal representation and advocates on behalf of low-income immigrants, prioritizing cases of immigrants seeking permanent refuge and safe haven, individuals subjected to domestic violence, and unaccompanied children. Our goals are to enable our clients to become documented, and attain permanent legal status in the U.S.

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

GBLS represents low-income individuals and families to gain and retain subsistence benefits, including Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children cash assistance, Food Stamps, and related benefits such as child care and education and training programs. We advocate for policy and practice changes to reduce systemic barriers to accessing public benefits.

Special Programs

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

Asian Outreach Unit: Provides legal guidance and assistance to nearly 1,000 low-income Asian immigrants each year, obtaining and preserving the most basic needs for them and their families.

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 from state and local agencies, institutional rights, and special education.

If You Need Legal Help

You may be eligible for GBLs' services if your legal issue is a civil, non-criminal issue, you live within our service area, and your income does not exceed 125% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines. (Elder clients and Medicare beneficiaries 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
Cambridge, MA 02141
Tel: 617.603.2700 Fax: 617.494.8222
TDD: 617.494.1757

www.gbls.org

Legal assistance to persons 60 and over:

Tel. 1.866.778.0939

Hablamos español.

Interpreters available for non-English speakers.

Greater Boston Legal Services' Service Area



GBLS provides free civil (non-criminal) legal assistance to low-income people in Boston and thirty-one additional cities and towns. GBLS has an expanded service area for elders (age 60 and up) that includes 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:



...and justice for all



Providing high-quality,

free civil (noncriminal)

legal assistance for

poor people in greater Boston