



COVID-19 RESPONSE

Using civil legal aid to protect our community

HOUSING



From working in coalition with housing organizers, legislators, and other community groups at the start of the pandemic to enacting an Eviction and Foreclosure Moratorium, to continuing to represent individual clients in eviction defense, shelter access, and other housing rights cases, GBLS is on the front lines of the fight to prevent homelessness and housing instability in our region. Additionally, GBLS' housing staff is actively working to preserve affordable housing, prevent housing displacement, and ensure that all of our neighbors are safely and stably housed during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

EMPLOYMENT

With record unemployment and many families living paycheck to paycheck, the pandemic-triggered recession has exacerbated already dire financial circumstances for many households. Individuals filing for unemployment insurance (UI) at the beginning of the pandemic experienced a myriad of difficulties, from technology woes, to lack of language access, to unexplained denials. GBLS has prioritized helping clients with limited English proficiency and those without tech access to the state's electronic-only UI claims system. Leveraging the help of numerous volunteers, GBLS has helped over 3,000 individuals successfully file for UI, and connected many more to Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and other financial safety nets. GBLS has also been part of successful advocacy to increase state funding for UI and eliminate obstacles to accessing UI.



IMMIGRATION

While many courts shut down or closed in the early stages of the pandemic, immigration courts stayed open and active, continuing an anti-immigration campaign set out at the federal level. From advocating for safer detention conditions, to getting individuals released from detention, to fighting unjust deportations, GBLS' immigration work has continued with a sense of urgency throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

RECORD-SEALING

During the pandemic, GBLS has launched a Virtual CORI Sealing Clinic in partnership with the Boston Bar Association to help individuals seal or expunge criminal records in order to access employment and housing opportunities. GBLS has also been active in organizing efforts in support of decarceration, no-cost phone calls for incarcerated individuals, and opposing increased corrections spending.



CONSUMER RIGHTS

With more households relying on credit to make ends meet, consumer rights are more important than ever. GBLS' consumer attorneys have been advocating for consumer debt relief legislation, working with individual clients to combat predatory debt collections, and preparing for a wave of pandemic-related foreclosures while also contributing to mortgage and rent relief policy advocacy.

EDUCATION



As students moved to remote or hybridized models of learning, GBLS and other education advocates successfully pushed the state for clear guidelines on equitable education access for students with special needs. When students return to classroom learning, GBLS' education attorneys will ensure that disabled students receive the educational opportunities and remediation to which they're entitled.

HEALTH & DISABILITY

The COVID-19 crisis has brought new awareness to significant racial disparities in health outcomes, both in the treatment that people of color receive and the socio-economic circumstances that increase health risks. GBLS' health and disability staff have been actively protecting the rights and well-being of clients by advocating for equitable crisis standards of care, ensuring access to needed treatments and services, and more.

PUBLIC BENEFITS



Ensuring that clients are as financially stable as possible has been a top priority for GBLS throughout the pandemic. GBLS' public benefits advocates work closely with individual clients to access or maintain income supports, food stamps, childcare, and other safety net services, while also advocating on the state level for improvements to entitlement programs. During the crisis, GBLS advocates have been called upon for their expertise by public benefits agencies who are implementing new pandemic programs.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

When the pandemic forced families to shelter in place, many survivors of domestic violence were forced to shelter with their abuser or negotiate contentious child custody and visitation orders in order to preserve their family's health and safety. GBLS' family law staff continue their work to protect survivors and families from further harm, and empower them to live safe and independent lives.



GENERAL OPERATIONS

GBLS staff has worked remotely since mid-March, adapting systems and enhancing technology as quickly as possible to meet client and community needs while also keeping everyone safe. In order to expedite access to services, GBLS' various legal departments set up direct phone lines for clients; increased outreach and information shared with community groups and other organizations; and created a hub on GBLS' website with resources. Direct clients services occur over the phone, via video conferencing, and even on clients' front porches and in the GBLS offices when absolutely necessary. GBLS continues to develop remote client engagement opportunities, including virtual legal clinics, issue-specific "know your rights" videos and materials, and legislative campaigns to improve the circumstances that affect community members in need.