



# GREATER BOSTON LEGAL SERVICES

... and justice for all

NEWS

Fall/Winter

2010

## GBLS Consumer Rights Unit Saves Client from Losing His Home

"Ricardo" came to the Consumer Rights Unit for help avoiding foreclosure. He had become temporarily disabled due to a work injury and his hours had been decreased. His mortgage payments were over \$1,800/month, and he was falling behind and facing the loss of his home.

The funding our supporters provided made it possible for one of our attorneys and a law firm-supported fellow to work with Ricardo to ensure he could remain in his home and afford his mortgage payments. They helped Ricardo apply for a loan modification and monitored the status of the application for several months, but meanwhile a foreclosure sale of his home was scheduled. GBLS was able to get the foreclosure cancelled and Ricardo was eventually placed into a permanent modification with monthly payments of only \$894.

Due to your support, GBLS continues to help many clients similar to Ricardo to avoid foreclosure and remain in their homes. **THANK YOU.**



With assistance from GBLS' Consumer Rights Unit, "Ricardo" (left) obtained a mortgage loan modification and avoided foreclosure. Mintz Levin deferred associate Josh Zakim, right, was one of the attorneys in the unit who worked with Ricardo to secure this great outcome. *Photo by Nadine Cohen*

When no one else can help, GBLS provides free assistance on civil (noncriminal) legal matters to poor people living in Greater Boston who need help obtaining food, income, shelter, and safety.

Visit us on the web:

[www.gbls.org](http://www.gbls.org)

## Meehan, Boyle, Black & Bogdanow Funds GBLS Law Intern Fellowships

Meehan, Boyle, Black & Bogdanow, in honor of the firm's 25th anniversary, has made a \$25,000 gift to fund law student interns at GBLS. Law students are a valuable resource for GBLS in serving its clients. While interning at GBLS, the interns gain invaluable experience and learn first hand the critical difference legal assistance can make for the lives of the poor.

Meehan, Boyle Managing Attorney Michael B. Bogdanow stated, "This is a great investment for our firm. Meehan, Boyle recognizes the impor-

*continued on page 3*



Meehan, Boyle, Black & Bogdanow Managing Attorney Michael B. Bogdanow (left) and Attorney and GBLS Board member John J. Carroll, Jr. (middle) giving GBLS Executive Director Robert Sable a generous check to fund law intern fellowships at GBLS. *Photo by Linda Lank*

### Inside...

- Bilingual ballot bill passes . . . . . 2
- Chronically ill client gets benefits. . . . . 2
- Attorney interview . . . . . 3
- Foreclosure bill passes . . . . . 3
- Congratulations, GBLS staff . . . . . 4

## GBLS Plays Key Role in Passage of Bilingual Ballot Bill for Asian-American Boston Voters

On July 31, 2010, Governor Patrick signed into law a bill that will make voting much easier for Asian-American voters in Boston whose first language is Chinese or Vietnamese. In 2005, the city of Boston had agreed to provide bilingual ballots in a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice, but that agreement expired in 2008. GBLS represented community groups as amicus curiae in that case. Since then, GBLS' Asian Outreach Unit (AOU) and the Coalition for Asian American Voting Rights led by a group of elderly voter activists worked tirelessly to educate lawmakers about the need for bilingual ballots, including transliteration of candidate names. GBLS staff also interpreted for Asian-American voters at the polls. Most of the citizens on whose behalf these efforts were made are limited-English-proficient elders.

This bill's passage, at a time that many thought it impossible, was a great victory for Americans of Chinese and Vietnamese descent who are eager to participate in the democratic process along with other citizens.



Governor Patrick signing "An Act Relative to the Preparation of Certain Ballots in the City of Boston" into law in July 2010, surrounded by community advocates and bill sponsors and supporters. The law will make voting much easier for Asian-American voters whose first language is Chinese or Vietnamese. GBLS attorney Cynthia Mark is 3rd from left. The bill's lead sponsors, Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz (directly behind the Governor) and Representative Jeffrey Sanchez (far right of the picture) along with Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Chinatown's state representative (to the left of Sen. Chang-Diaz) were also instrumental in getting the bill passed and signed into law.

*Photo by Coalition for Asian American Voting Rights*

## Goodwin Procter "Deferred Associate" at GBLS Wins Victory for Client Denied Welfare Benefits

Since 2009 eight local law firms have provided the services of associates to GBLS for a year at no cost to the organization, a huge boon during a period when GBLS has had to lay off staff. Attorney Rosalie Fazio (pictured at right) is one such associate, who provided legal assistance to close to 100 low-income clients whom GBLS would have had to turn away had Goodwin Procter not funded Rosalie's position at GBLS. Rosalie's first case was representing a welfare recipient with a chronic illness who since 2001 had been wrongfully denied part of her welfare benefits. With help from her colleagues in GBLS' Welfare Law Unit, Rosalie's advocacy led the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to finally agree to make a retroactive payment, but not for the full period since 2001.

Rosalie and her fellow attorneys believed GBLS had a strong legal position to continue fighting for full retroactive payments, and Rosalie also felt strongly about the

injustice and irrationality of a random period of retroactive benefits. Rosalie persevered and the DTA agreed to make a full retroactive payment. GBLS estimates that the client will receive the benefits that she is owed—approximately \$13,000—dating back to 1998 when the error began. The

client started using the payments received to pay tuition for a community college vocational program. Her return to nursing school in September 2010 is a hard-won victory in more ways than one; she'll be balancing school with her frequent medical treatments.



Law firms provided the services of these associates in the Employment, Consumer Rights, Family Law, and Welfare Law Units, as well as in the Asian Outreach Unit. From left to right: Radhika Bhattacharya (Goodwin Procter), Yin Zhou (WilmerHale), Julia Monack (Ropes & Gray), David Dineen (Foley Hoag), Josh Zakim (Mintz Levin), Rosalie Fazio (Goodwin Procter); Alex Burakoff (Goulston & Storrs). Missing: Meyer Potashman (Foley Hoag), Maggie Rosenberg (Ropes & Gray), and Phil Torrey (Skadden). See page 3 for more associates.

*Photo by Linda Lank*

## A Conversation with Alex Burakoff, Consumer Rights Unit Attorney and “Deferred Associate”

Attorney Alex Burakoff, whose start date at Goulston & Storrs was deferred for a year after the economy slowed down, cut his legal teeth in the Consumer Rights Unit under Managing Attorney Nadine Cohen. “It has been a great experience,” he says. “Working at GBLS presents a set of opportunities and responsibilities that I would not have experienced if I had transitioned directly from law school to a law firm.”

### In what ways does starting your legal work at GBLS differ from starting at a firm?

At GBLS, from the start, I have had my own clients and I have been involved in every aspect of their cases. There is a lot of client interaction and a great deal of responsibility that goes along with managing your own caseload.

### Is there a case that has been particularly memorable for you?

One case that is a priority for me involves a paraplegic [who] has been in and out of the hospital for a long time and has many medical issues. He fell behind on his monthly mortgage payments and was going to be foreclosed on

in August. He needs his home because he is in a wheelchair and the home is handicap accessible. We negotiated with the bank to suspend the foreclosure and enter him into a trial period loan modification, which reduced his monthly payment to a more affordable amount. His trial period plan concluded in September and we will negotiate with the bank to enter him into a permanent modification.

### What have been the best aspects about working with the other legal staff at GBLS?

[O]ne of the strengths of GBLS...is that there are so many lawyers and staff members with great experience in a variety of legal areas. I have received a lot of input from other attorneys on many of my cases. [Also], the attorneys and staff members are here because they want to be here, because they want to help, because they are passionate about their work. When you have a passion for your job, you are more likely to excel at it. The attorneys and staff at GBLS work here because they care about the work, their clients and achieving social change.

## Meehan, Boyle Gift

*continued from page 1*

tant role that lawyers play in ensuring that some of the most vulnerable have access to the justice they seek. We share a commonality of interests with GBLS, serving the most disenfranchised residents of our community, and feel that this is the most appropriate way to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of our firm.”

GBLS Executive Director Robert Sable stated, “GBLS is very grateful for this generous gift; it could not have come at a better time. Due to severe funding cuts, particularly from the Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts program, GBLS has had to eliminate 20 advocate positions and in the next year expects to have to lay off a similar number if more money cannot be raised. This gift will provide GBLS with additional resources to carry out its important mission of providing legal assistance for the poor.”

## GBLS Takes Lead in Passage of Foreclosure Bill

Through the efforts of GBLS attorneys, in July 2010 the Massachusetts legislature passed a foreclosure bill providing that tenants cannot be evicted from foreclosed properties except for just cause or if the property is sold to a third party. GBLS had spent countless hours building a strong coalition with dozens of community groups and working with The Massachusetts Alliance Against Predatory Lending, Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association, and elected officials to make this happen.

The bill also provides increased protections for homeowners facing foreclosure and a requirement that there be in-person counseling before elders obtain reverse mortgages. GBLS anticipates needing to educate both tenants and banks about this new bill and to be able to use it to keep elder tenants in their homes. Tenants will finally have stronger protections from eviction, and owners will have more leverage to fight their foreclosures.



Ropes & Gray provided the services of these associates to GBLS. Timothy Hoitink (l) worked with the Housing Law Unit, Meg Rehauer (middle) recently started in the Consumer Rights Unit, and Dan Routh (r) works at GBLS’ Cambridge/Somerville office. See page 2 for more associates.

*Photo by Linda Lank*

# Congratulations!

**Manisha Bhatt**, Family Law Unit Senior Attorney, was appointed to the Probate and Family Court Practice Working Group of the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission. The group is responsible for assessing whether individuals continue to have difficulties in obtaining access to the Probate and Family Court, including those with limited English proficiency. The group will then identify opportunities and strategies for eliminating these difficulties.

**Carla Moniz**, Immigration Law Unit Attorney, was awarded a one-year Bart Gordon Fellowship by the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation to support her work at GBLS. Carla provides legal representation in immigration matters to poor, undocumented individuals who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other violent crimes.

**Bob Sable**, Executive Director, was honored in September 2010 with the Boston Bar Association’s John G. Brooks Legal Services Award “for his relentless advocacy on behalf of indigent clients and his exemplary leadership in providing access to some of the most vulnerable people in society”.

**GBLS’ Relocation Counseling and Identity Protection Initiative (Family Law Unit staff)** produced the handout “Myths & Realities of Identity Change” in partnership with the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) Safety Net Project. From January to June 2010, it was the second most-downloaded Safety Net document on NNEDV’s website (downloaded 1646 times).

See [http://nnedv.org/docs/SafetyNet/NNEDV\\_IdentityChange\\_MythsAndRealities.pdf](http://nnedv.org/docs/SafetyNet/NNEDV_IdentityChange_MythsAndRealities.pdf).



GBLS Executive Director Bob Sable accepting the John G. Brooks Legal Services Award from Boston Bar Association President Don Frederico on September 29, 2010.

*Photo by Eric Fullerton, Boston Bar Association staff*



197 Friend Street  
 Boston, MA 02114  
 617.371.1234  
[www.gbbs.org](http://www.gbbs.org)

© SCMT 274C

Non-Profit Org.  
 US Postage Paid  
 Permit #54162  
 Boston, MA