

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of Northeast Legal Aid,

Due to the pandemic, this past year has been a challenging one for all of us but especially so for the low-income and elderly clients served by Northeast Legal Aid and its subsidiary, the Northeast Justice Center. The hardships endured by our client community are made readily apparent in the small number of stories described in the pages below. Please take a few moments to read these brief descriptions of our clients' struggles and of our efforts to help them.

You can join in the effort to help too. Your financial contributions provide the resources to support those in desperate need during this pandemic. You can contribute by mail or on-line at www.northeastlegalaid.org. Your contributions can prevent homelessness, help prevent food insecurity, confront discrimination and racial injustice, forestall brutal domestic violence, and help rectify many other types of wrongdoing.

To those who have supported Northeast Legal Aid in the past, many thanks and please continue to help us in these difficult times in our community. To all others, please join us in this effort to help those with profound needs. Thank you.

Sincerely,

George K. Weber,
Executive Director

Gkaleber

Northeast Legal Aid is funded in part by the Legal Services Corporation. As a condition of this LSC funding, NLA is restricted from engaging in certain activities in all of its legal work including work supported by other funding sources. NLA may not expend any funds for any activity prohibited by the LSC Act, 42 U.S.C. 2996, or by Public Law 104-134, which requires that notice of these restrictions be given to you. If you would like a copy of these laws or have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Front cover: Mateo left his home country of Ecuador in 2016, fleeing his abusive father, gang violence, and deep poverty, to reunite with his mother in the United States. Soon after, Mateo was placed in deportation proceedings. The Justice Center helped Mateo obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, allowing him to stay in the United States with his mother until he received his green card in 2020. Today, Mateo is attending college and is studying to become an architect. Clients like Mateo inspire us to continue to provide essential legal services. Thank you, Mateo, for being one of our heroes.

Donated Services: Photo Contribution: Michael Weinhold; Jennifer Keegan. Graphic Design: Kimberley Carroll-Cox Editorial Support: Mollie Guba, Catherine Hurley





AN AFFILIATE OF NORTHEAST LEGAL AID

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

OUR WORK	2
2020 IN NUMBERS	16
OUR FUNDERS	20
OUR TEAM	22

Northeast Legal Aid (NLA)—through its board, management, and staff helps low-income and elderly people of Northeast Massachusetts obtain justice and empowerment through skillful, creative, and persistent advocacy for systemic change and high-quality individual representation.

This past year at Northeast Legal Aid tested all of us. Please take some time to read the inspiring stories of Northeast Legal Aid and the Northeast Justice Center's COVID year. While our clients inspire us, we hope the intrepid work of our staff will inspire you.



ADDRESSING THE RISE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING LOCKDOWN

Emma is a 9-year-old girl whose mother, Ana, moved into a domestic violence shelter after suffering years of abuse by Emma's father. Ana was still married to her abuser but was separated from him after moving into the shelter. However, Emma's father refused to allow Ana to take Emma with her, leaving Emma alone with her abusive father. While Emma was living with her father, the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) received several reports of alleged abuse and neglect by her father. DCF informed Ana of the allegations and expressed its belief that Emma's father was a danger to her, making it critical for Ana to immediately get a protective order on Emma's behalf against her father.

Making matters more difficult, Ana is a native Spanish speaker with limited English proficiency, and this highly time-sensitive situation was unfolding during the worst of the courts' backlog due to COVID-19. However, NLA Attorney Sarah O'Brien managed to schedule a hearing promptly, at which time an order was issued instructing police to serve Emma's father immediately and to arrange for him to bring Emma to her mother at the police station. Thanks to Sarah's tireless efforts, Emma received the protective order she needed to live with her mother and with protection from her father. Ana and Emma are now living safely in an emergency shelter together.

STAFF COMPASSION:

SARAH O'BRIEN, STAFF ATTORNEY

Sarah O'Brien has worked at NLA for over two years in the Family Law Unit. During COVID-19, Sarah rose to the occasion and led the unit in developing creative legal strategies to help low-income survivors of domestic violence. The office regularly receives feedback from appreciative clients and service providers who praise Sarah for her understanding and sensitivity towards poverty and domestic violence. Sarah's kindness towards clients and advocacy in the courtroom enable clients to feel empowered when facing their abusers.







COMBATING THE MASSACHUSETTS EVICTION CRISIS

When the Massachusetts eviction moratorium expired in October 2020, it put tens of thousands of Massachusetts residents at risk of eviction. Over 5,400 eviction cases were filed in November and December alone. An eviction crisis, born out of the economic downturn that many faced during the pandemic, started to sweep across the state and country. NLA's service area was one of the hardest hit in the state. Middlesex County suffered more eviction cases than any other county in Massachusetts since the start of 2020, and between January 2020 and April 2021, approximately 4700 residents of Essex County and Middlesex County received an eviction notice for non-payment of rent. However, during a time of unprecedented demand for services, NLA's Housing Unit stepped up to meet this need, going above and beyond to serve as many individuals and families as possible.

Between January 2020 to April 2021, NLA's housing advocates have closed 560 housing cases while maintaining an outstanding success rate, with the vast majority of our clients remaining safely housed. These cases have dealt with a variety of housing issues such as tenants' rights, federally subsidized housing, and housing discrimination. We are grateful for the generous funding received to support our Housing Unit's efforts in combating these issues, such as the City of Lawrence's grant for our Eviction Prevention Program and the Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) grant for our participation in the COVID Eviction Legal Help Project (CELHP). We would also like to express our appreciation for each of the inspiring advocates in our Housing Unit who have worked tirelessly to help the vulnerable members of our communities while navigating the challenges of the remote work environment.

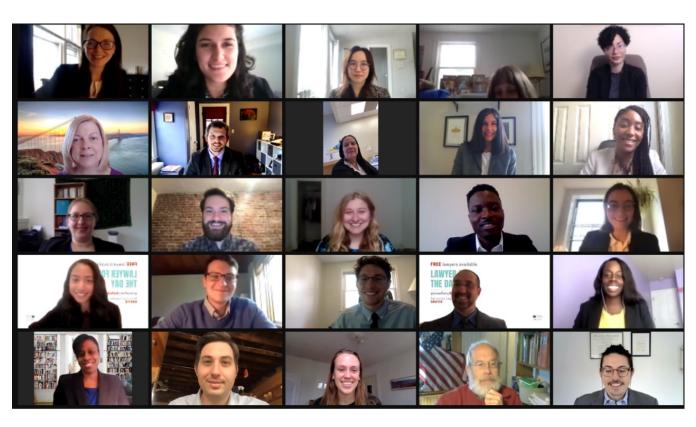
STAFF ENERGY:

EDEN CHORM, PARALEGAL

Eden works as a paralegal in the Housing Unit out of NLA's Lowell office. She has been with NLA for almost four years. Eden specializes in Cambodian-American outreach, as she is fluent in Khmer. During the pandemic, Eden has gone above and beyond for her clients to make sure members of the Cambodian-American community in Lynn and Lowell are getting the help they need.



Staff Teamwork! Northeast Legal Aid's Housing Unit tripled in size over the past year. Their essential work allowed hundreds of northeastern Massachusetts residents to keep their homes during a critical time period. **Stefanie Balandis** and **Mike Weinhold** have created a team environment where advocates work together to handle the onslaught of housing cases resulting from the pandemic.







SECURING THE CARE THAT ELDERS NEED

Sofia is a disabled resident of state-aided elder housing who, for over 10 years, lived with no family around her. As she grew more frail, though, it became clear that she would need greater assistance due to her disability. To help provide the care that Sofia needed, her grandson Leo came from Puerto Rico to live with her. However, the Housing Authority claimed that it was against regulations for Leo to live with her, causing Sofia to face eviction. On top of the difficulty of living alone under the burden of her physical challenges, Sofia was now at risk of being without secure housing.

Northeast Legal Aid advocate Lorraine Medrano took on Sofia's case. She filed a reasonable accommodation request asking the Housing Authority to allow Leo to stay because of Sofia's disability and providing the Housing Authority with confirmation from Sofia's doctor that she needed Leo's assistance. While the Housing Authority agreed that Sofia needed a live-in aide, it still would not allow Leo to live with her due to federal regulations. Ultimately, after debate about the pertinence of state versus federal regulations, Lorraine was able to get the Housing Authority to transfer Sofia and Leo to a two-bedroom unit in family public housing and to obtain \$1000 to help them pay for moving expenses. Sofia and Leo are now secure in their new housing, and Sofia is able to get the day-to-day care she needs to live comfortably and safely.

STAFF HOPE:

LORRAINE MEDRANO, PARALEGAL

Lorraine Medrano has worked at legal aid for over twenty years. As Senior Housing Paralegal, Lorraine is dedicated to helping low-income individuals maintain housing stability by defending subsidy terminations. Additionally, she plays a vital role in the Lynn Session Lawyer for the Day program and was instrumental in taking the program remote after the pandemic struck last year, ensuring tenants connect with us after the courthouses closed.







PRO BONO AT NORTHEAST LEGAL AID:

KEEPING ELDERS SAFELY HOUSED THROUGH PRO BONO ADVOCACY

Not only have our pro bono attorneys been crucial to our work on a broader scale in 2020, but they also have been impactful on an individual level as true advocates for the safety of our clients. Through the COVID Eviction Legal Help Project (CELHP), Pro Bono Attorney Kate Bergeron of Nelson Mullins successfully advocated for our elder client, Susan. Susan lives in project-based Section 8 housing and has also dealt with mental health disabilities exacerbated by COVID-19.

During the summer, Susan's landlord filed a Preliminary Injunction against her for behavior related to her disabilities and, months later, an eviction action against her for similar behavior. Additionally, just as the parties were on their way to a resolution, the landlord filed a Contempt Complaint for violation of a Preliminary Injunction seeking possession of the apartment and urging that Susan be put in jail. Attorney Bergeron then sprang into action, researching the laws in question. Equipped with clear information about her choices and assurance from Attorney Bergeron that the law was on her side, Susan felt empowered to make the decision to go to trial. The judge ruled in Susan's favor. With Susan being an elderly individual facing potential jail time and the loss of her housing, it is difficult to imagine how she would have navigated this situation alone. Having Attorney Bergeron in her corner allowed Susan to trust in the court process and, ultimately, settle her eviction case and remain safely in her subsidized housing.



Nelson Mullins has been one of the law firms that committed to doing eviction defense work for Northeast Legal Aid during the COVID-19 eviction crisis.

PRO BONO GENEROSITY:

KATE BERGERON, PRO BONO ATTORNEY

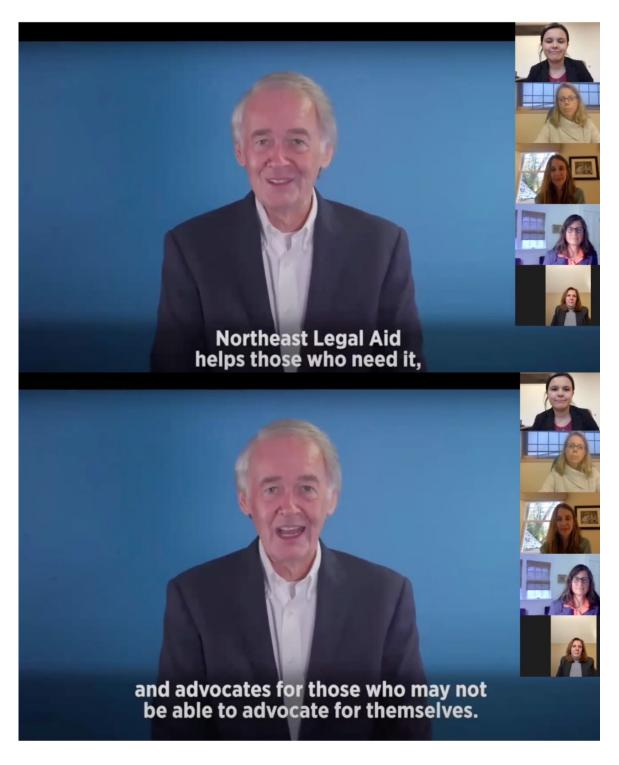
Kate volunteered with NLA this past year as part of the CELHP pro bono program. She is an associate at Nelson Mullins, a large law firm in Boston. She took on a housing case, which was a very last-minute request. She stepped up and prepared the client, prepared witnesses, and gathered evidence, taking the case to trial, all at the last minute. Thanks to her diligence and skill, she won the trial and prevailed for the client, enforcing her rights as a tenant.



2020 VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION EVENT

Northeast Legal Aid would like to thank our dedicated pro bono volunteers for their support and hard work over the past year. Our volunteers are always a critical part of the work we do, but we at NLA needed their support in 2020 more than ever. To recognize their valuable efforts, we hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Event virtually in October. The team at Northeast Legal Aid was glad to be able to honor our volunteers at this event, and we look forward to hopefully all being together in person at the next such event.

Senator Ed Markey shared a few words during Northeast Legal Aid's Pro Bono Appreciation event in October.





KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER IN THEIR TIME OF NEED

Margaret is a mother of three living in an Emergency Assistance shelter with her adult daughter Isabella and her two sons. Early in 2020, Isabella left their shelter to stay with her sister who lives on Long Island and, consequently, was removed from their shelter household. While Isabella was staying with her sister, she suffered a traumatic incident and left Long Island soon after. However, because Isabella had been removed from the shelter, she was not allowed to move back in with her mother after returning to Massachusetts. Not only was Isabella leaving Long Island pregnant and scarred by the trauma of her time there, but she was left homeless without her family's shelter to return to during the first lockdown of the pandemic.

That's when NLA advocate Alcira Kane stepped in. Alcira submitted an Emergency Assistance accommodation (ADA) request for Isabella to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which would hopefully allow Isabella to move back in with her family as a necessary accommodation for her pregnancy. The DHCD approved that request, so Isabella was allowed to return to the comfort of her own home and was reunited with her family right before the spring holiday.

STAFF COURAGE:

ALCIRA KANE, PARALEGAL

Alcira Kane is a public benefits paralegal who has been with NLA for 45 years. Alcira handles SSI/SSDI, EA Shelter, food stamp and cash benefits, and unemployment denial matters. Her profound dedication to her clients is relentless. During the pandemic, Alcira went to homeless shelters, appeared in hearings with her clients, and came into the Lawrence office on a regular basis, never missing a beat and always being there for the people who needed her the most.







SUPPORTING PARENTS AND STUDENTS IN THE TIME OF REMOTE LEARNING

Maria is a young mother living in Lynn with her 14-year-old daughter, Rose, and working at a dentist's office. During the initial COVID-19 shutdown, Maria received unemployment benefits that allowed her to stay home with Rose, but when Maria was eventually called back to work, she was still unable to return because Rose's school was fully remote. Maria did not want to go back to work full-time with Rose at home alone and left to handle the new online learning environment by herself. Even though Maria was caring for her child who was learning from home, her situation was viewed as a voluntary quit by the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA). As a result, DUA determined that Maria was ineligible for further unemployment benefits, making it impossible for her to support herself and Rose. Maria was also found ineligible for the unemployment compensation that she had previously received and was charged with an overpayment of those benefits. Maria still needed to be able to stay home with Rose and was already struggling to make ends meet, let alone pay the alleged overpayment.

The Northeast Justice Center's Emily Herzig then represented Maria at her appeal hearing, arguing that, under a new policy established since the start of the pandemic, parents have good cause to not accept work when their children are going to school in a fully remote format. Emily's advocacy led to the DUA reversing its determination that Rose was old enough to stay home alone while attending school fully remotely. Additionally, the DUA withdrew the overpayment demand. Thanks to Emily's work, Maria was able to receive the unemployment benefits she needed to stay home with her daughter and assist her with school during the pandemic.

STAFF TENACITY:

EMILY HERZIG, PARALEGAL

Emily Herzig has been with NJC for 35 years, assisting clients obtain and retain much needed benefits, including food assistance, emergency shelter, disability benefits and much more. Her work during the COVID pandemic has been vital due to the number of individuals and families who found themselves in desperate need of such benefits. During this time Emily worked with clients to obtain and retain unemployment benefits, a need that we have seen increase substantially since the start of the pandemic.







PROTECTING DETAINED CLIENTS FROM THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, the Justice Center's Immigration Unit advocates became extremely worried about immigrants in detention awaiting their day in court due to the spread of COVID-19 in jails. Even in the best-run facilities, detained immigrants are unable to socially distance or follow proper sanitization procedures, thus creating a higher risk of spreading the virus. While immigrants are often held in jails or other detention centers while their immigration cases are pending they do not have the same constitutional protections as people detained pursuant to criminal charges. In March of 2020, as this public health crisis unfolded, Justice Center Attorney Melinda Bonacore flew into action and played a crucial role in addressing these concerns through critically-needed advocacy for one detainee whose life was at risk due to COVID-19.

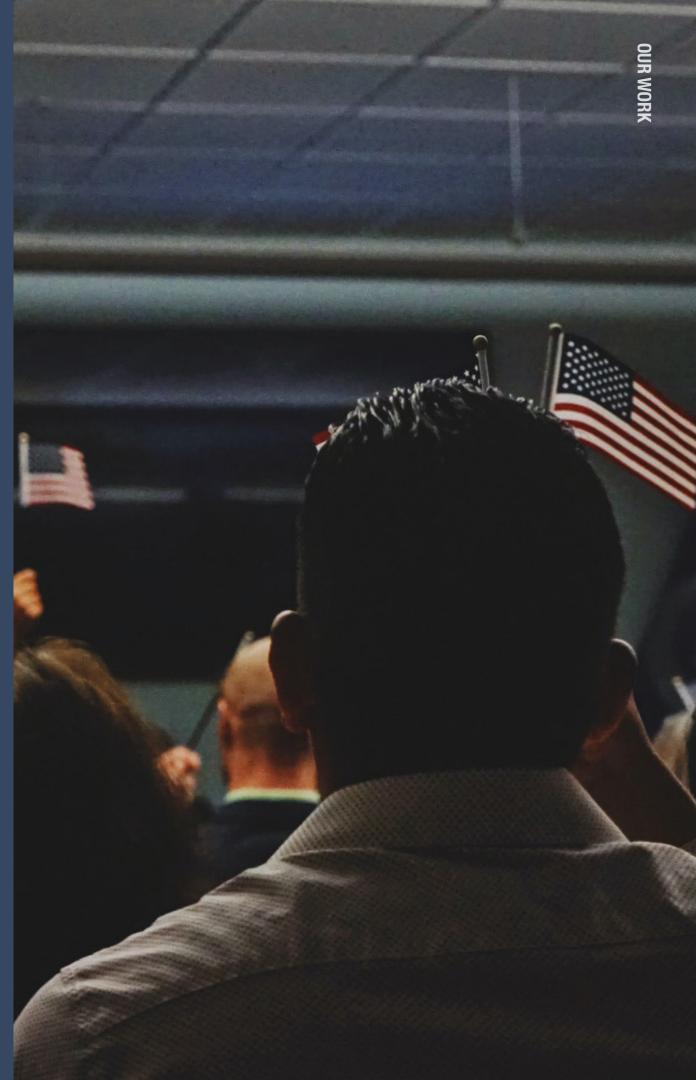
Melinda was representing the client in immigration detention in Strafford County, New Hampshire. She had filed a habeas petition with the U.S. District Court in New Hampshire the prior month, asking the Immigration Court for a new bond hearing. However, when the scope and danger of the pandemic became clear, she amended that petition to add a request that the District Court order the client released due to his chronic medical conditions that put him at higher risk of COVID-19 complications. Shortly after Melinda filed the amended petition, the ACLU of New Hampshire contacted her to inform her that they were filing a class action on behalf of all immigrant detainees in the Strafford County facility, which would include her client as a class member of the lawsuit. Melinda was then able to negotiate a deal in which her client was ensured a speedy bond hearing in the District Court, helping to expedite his release from the dangerous conditions of detention. She also worked closely with the ACLU and pro bono private counsel in the class action, serving as second-chair in the bond hearing that led to the federal judge granting release pursuant to conditions. Thanks to Melinda's advocacy, her client was released from detention - just before a severe outbreak of COVID-19 hit the Strafford County facility.

STAFF DEDICATION:

MELINDA BONCORE, STAFF ATTORNEY

Melinda Bonacore has been a staff attorney within the NJC Immigration Unit for over 2 years. Melinda handles all types of immigration matters with a focus on humanitarian relief for vulnerable immigrants, including obtaining asylum for immigrants fleeing persecution in their home countries or obtaining Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for unaccompanied minors. Melinda's efforts to date have led to numerous immigrants being released from detention. During the pandemic, she continued to fight for the rights of detained immigrants, particularly after COVID-19 became a clear-and-present danger in detention facilities.







ORTHEAST LEGAL AII

2,708 CASES SERVED

6,427 PEOPLE HELPED

*INCLUDING HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

2020 VOLUNTEER HOURS

1,292 NLA IN-HOUSE ATTORNEY TOTAL

422 NJC IN-HOUSE ATTORNEY TOTAL

1,714 TOTAL ATTORNEY HOURS

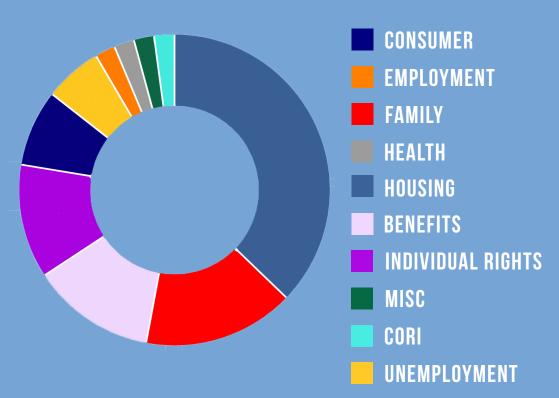
DUSE ATTORNEY TOTALS DOES NOT INCLUDE DONATED PRO BONO HOURS

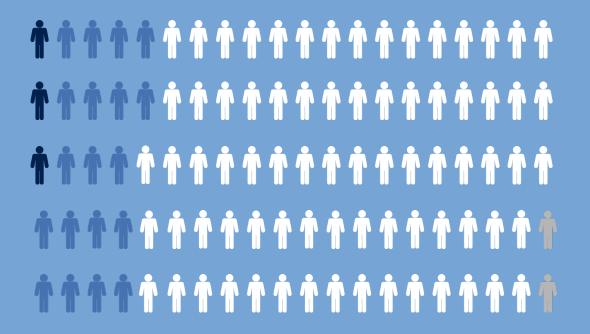
4, 181.6 NLA NON-ATTORNEY TOTAL

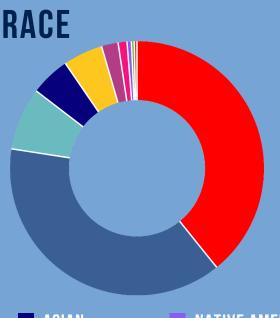
688,5 NJC NON-ATTORNEY TOTAL

4,870.1 TOTAL NON-ATTORNEY HOURS

PRACTICE AREAS







ASIAN

BLACK

CAPE VERDEAN

HISPANIC

MULTI-RACIAL

NATIVE AMERICAN

NATIVE HAWAIIAN

WHITE

OTHER

UNKNOWN

GENDER

70%

FEMALE

29%

MALE

1% OTHER



REVENUE

Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation	\$ 3,486,159
Legal Services Corporation	\$ 1,211,056
Government Grant	\$ 1,100,965
Foundation Grants	\$ 572,147
Private Fundraising	\$ 23,734
Attorney Fees	\$ 77,913
Other Income	\$ 826,303
Revenue Before Donated Services	\$ 7,298,277
Donated Services	\$ 580,801
Total Revenue After Donated Services	\$ 7,879,078

EXPENSES

Personnel	\$ 5,118,243
Occupancy	\$ 329,048
<u>Operations</u>	\$ 196,374
Library & Litigation	\$ 67,734
Contract Services	\$ 90,818
Expenses Before Donated Services	\$ 5,802,217
Donated Services	\$ 580,801
Expenses After Donated Services	\$ 6,383,018
CHANGE IN NET ASSET	\$ 1,496,060



FUNDERS

Thank you! Northeast Legal Aid would like to extend its appreciation to all of our generous funders and supporters.

















































 $\begin{array}{c} Massachusetts \\ Legal \\ Assistance \\ Corporation \end{array}$

















A BIG THANKS TO ...

Thank you! Northeast Legal Aid would like to extend its appreciation to all of our generous funders and supporters.





Special thanks to Nelson Mullins and Fish & Richardson for their unflagging commitment to eviction defense work preserving tenancies for our clients in need.





Special thanks to Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education for their generosity in providing free legal training to Northeast Legal Aid attorneys throughout 2020. Special thanks to DLA Piper for successfully representing multiple domestic violence survivors in 209A hearings and securing safety for many of our clients in need.

MAJOR DONORS:

Ann Aucello Elena Byhoff Britt Evangelist Julius Fister & Liliana Gheorghiu

The Lubrizol
Foundation

Ted McEnroe Mark Pearlstein Nathan Soucy

Thomas and Delane Weber



OUR TEAM

NORTHEAST LEGAL AID'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT

Shannon M. Barnes, Esq. Salem

VICE PRESIDENT

Raymond Weicker, Esq. Chelmsford

TREASURER

Richard Vitali, Esq. Attorney at Law Lynn

CLERK

Ellen Shimer-McGuire, Esq Shimer & Dauksewicz, LLC Haverhill

James P. Hall, Esq. Chelmsford

James Krasnoo, Esq. Krasnoo, Klehm & Falkner LLP Andover

Sonya Brown, Esq Attorney At Law Lowell

Mabel Pizarro Lawrence

Marta S. Romero Lawrence

Peter J. Parlow, Esq.Law Office of Peter J. Parlow Lowell

Stephen Colella, Esq. Attorney At Law North Andover

David W. Monahan, Esq Attorney At Law Reading

Nelly GuerreroLawrence

Wanda Moya Lawrence

Louise Fortune Lynn

Martin Hart Topsfield

STAFF

NORTHEAST LEGAL AID MANAGERS

George K. Weber Executive Director

Paul Collier NLA Special Supervisor for Housing Norman Morris Chief Financial Officer

Christine Wayne Program Administrator

Stefanie Balandis Associate Director

Mel Jiganti LITC Program Director

Courtney Pitta Pro Bono Manager Michael Weinhold Supervisory Attorney for Housing Law

Rachel Biscardi Supervisory Attorney for Family Law

Jennifer Keegan Managing Attorney for Development

Corine Reardon Program Administrator

NORTHEAST LEGAL AID STAFF

Sean Ahern Maylis Brito Eden Chorm Sovannseila Chuop Ian Collins Ellen Crowley Flerida De La Cruz Arianna Efstathiou Lisa Eyssallenne Martina Figueroa Judrick Fletcher Niccolo Gandini

Blake Giosa

Jenny Giraldo Kathleen Gracza Abigail Gramaglia Leila Gray Michael Gsovki Susan Ham Emma Hollis Deborah Horne Sarah Jaeb Amalia W. Jorns Alcira Kane Agnes Kaziba

Karen Mahoney

Yale Robinson Amarith Ros

Jolie Main Michele Rozier Susan Malouin William Shanley Sumbul Siddiqui Ellen Matzouranis Sarah Sloane Lorraine Medrano Jen Smith Dylan Morris Jacob Steinmann Linda Neary Kimberly Strovink Sarah O'Brien Natalie Suazo Leilani Pascale Meredith Sullivan Adela Perex-Franco Cassandra Wayne Rosabel Reves Alice Wear Danielle Richmond



NORTHEAST JUSTICE CENTER'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Shannon M. Barnes, Esq.

Salem

James Krasnoo, Esq. Krasnoo, Klehm & Falkner LLP

Andover

Samuel Goldhar

Ferrara Candy Chicago

Peter J. Parlow, Esq.

Law Office of Peter J. Parlow Beverly

Lowell

Alison Weingartner

NORTHEAST JUSTICE CENTER'S STAFF

Laura Gallant Ana Otero Ethan Horowitz

Managing Director Yoana Kuzmova Louisa Gibbs

Catherine Karuga-Ndivo Brian O'Donnell

Emily Herzig Managing Attorney

Adelina Janiak Lindsay Kramer Custer Melinda Bonacore

Marc Potvin

Daniel Ruben

John Ford Catherine Willard

STAFF ADAPTABILITY:

Myrta Cupeles

ELLEN MATZOURANIS, INTAKE

Ellen Matzouranis has been an intake specialist with Northeast Legal Aid for over 32 years. During the pandemic, the Intake Unit pivoted to a remote set-up and took calls from clients who were overwhelmed, and unable to access our office. Ellen quickly adapted to the virtual environment, continuing to provide accurate information to clients and helping to problem-solve. Ellen is behind the scenes, never seeking praise, but always there with a kind smile, empathy, and understanding towards our clients and staff.





