

Community Legal Aid (CLA)
405 Main Street, 4th Floor
Worcester, MA 01608
508-752-3718
www.communitylegal.org

“Community Legal Aid, Inc., provides free civil legal services to low-income and elderly residents of central and western Massachusetts. We assure fairness for all in the justice system, protecting homes, livelihoods, health, and families.”

Christina and Jen met with Valerie Zolezzi-Wyndham, Managing Attorney of CLA on 1/5/17 and here are the things we learned:

- CLA only represents CIVIL law cases, not criminal law.
- They receive 6000 applications/ year but have to turn away 2/3 of them, due to staffing, conflict of interest, or the case is outside their purview.
- Potential clients have to first fill out an application. They can apply online or over the phone, with the exception of Emergency Assistance (EA) clients.
- CLA would prefer you NOT to send walk-ins UNLESS they are unsheltered and in need of emergency shelter that night. Liz Alfred is the staff advocate for EA clients.
- There are call-in hours for 3 hrs/day.
- Once an application is received, CLA checks for “conflicts”, as in conflicts of interest. If they find any, a potential client might be turned away but not told why due to confidentiality laws. For example, CLA cannot rep both a wife and then a husband in a divorce case. Therefore, the husband would be turned away and would not be given an explanation why to protect his wife, the client.
- CLA only represents tenants, NOT LANDLORDS.
- Potential clients under the age of 60 must be under the 200% poverty level. For clients aged 60-plus, income level doesn’t matter.
- For patrons experiencing poor and/or dangerous living conditions, refer them to the Board of Health for timely resolution. For patrons with disputes with their landlords, send them to CLA.
- Please always encourage patrons to create a paper trail and make copies of all documentation!
- Masslegalhelp.org is an awesome website!
- Every Tuesday, Worcester Public Housing issues evictions; every Thursday, private residences issue evictions. For this reason, CLA housing advocacy staff is available at Lawyer for a Day at the courthouse on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

- Refer patrons who are undocumented immigrants needing lawful status to Central West Justice, 405 Main Street, 1st Floor.
- CLA does not get involved with Child Support cases; those cases fall under the purview of the Department of Revenue (DOR), which can only be reached via phone.

In summation...

DO refer patrons to apply for CLA via phone or online:

1. Patrons having difficulty obtaining benefits due them: SNAP (food stamps), TADC , EADC, Social Security, Disability, etc.
2. Patrons being discriminated against for housing.
3. Survivors of domestic violence.
4. Patrons experiencing unfair employment practices.
5. Patrons who are renters experiencing problems with their landlords.

DO refer patrons to WALK IN to CLA if they are unsheltered and seeking Emergency Assistance.

DON'T refer patrons to CLA:

1. Patrons with child support issues.
2. Patrons who are landlords and having problems with their tenants.
3. Patrons representing themselves in a criminal case.
4. Patrons needing assistance with citizenship application forms. Instead, refer to Ascentria.

Other areas of advocacy:

Children who are unjustly, harshly punished within the school system; CLA will advocate for those children and work on creating and implementing an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) if needed.

Know Your Rights about Translation Services! Did you know that the RMV, the DTA, etc. are legally required to provide translator service? Patrons can contact CLA for advocacy if they are being denied that service.