



Disability Law Center's FY 2019 Priorities

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Funding

DLC receives funding from government grants, private foundations, and individual contributions. For details about our funding and programs, please visit:

<http://www.dlc-ma.org/>

Introduction to the Priority Setting Process

What is a Priority?

Each year, the Disability Law Center (DLC) adopts a plan to focus its work on our core mission to keep people with disabilities safe from abuse and neglect and to address the most prevalent violations of disability rights laws. The plan includes our core functions and priorities that we determine based on input from the community.

Our priorities are the goals we work on every day to achieve full equality and justice for people with disabilities. We have to establish priorities because, after we address abuse and neglect issues, we do not have the resources necessary to tackle all of the issues facing people with disabilities at one time.

Through public input and our work with clients, we identify problems that are widespread or pose the greatest threat to the independence of people with disabilities. Then we develop priorities to address those problems with the funding that is left.

Why Do We Need Priorities?

DLC is the federally mandated protection and advocacy (P&A) system in Massachusetts. We receive most of our funding from the federal government. The majority of our funding must be devoted to our core functions of monitoring and investigating abuse and neglect in places where people with disabilities live and receive services. The work we do with any other resources we have must be prioritized to guide the work of our legal staff and provide the structure required by these other funding sources.

How Does DLC Obtain Input?

DLC holds trainings and outreach events throughout Massachusetts. We ask people for their input at these events. DLC also gathers input through surveys, community partners, and members of the community. Individuals can also provide input at any point by calling or emailing DLC with their thoughts or by submitting a website comment.

Core Function of DLC

DLC's Core Function is to keep people with disabilities safe from abuse and neglect wherever they live and where they receive services. DLC does this by monitoring for abuse and neglect as well as investigating allegations of abuse and neglect. DLC also provides information, referral and training so that we can use our limited resources by providing people with disabilities and their advocates with the tools they need for self-advocacy.

Abuse and Neglect

Keep People Safe in Facilities through Monitoring Efforts

Consistent with our federal mandate, DLC monitors facilities where people with disabilities live or receive services to prevent, detect, and address instances of abuse, neglect or exploitation. Our monitoring activities may include: (1) face-to-face interviews with individuals with disabilities living in the facility, (2) face-to-face interviews with staff members working in the facility, (3) observation and evaluation of the physical conditions of the facility, and (4) a review of records, when appropriate, in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. Our primary goal is to ensure that the residents' rights are protected and that they are living in a safe environment. We also want to ensure that appropriate services are being provided and that individuals have access to opportunities to participate in activities and work that are important to them. Finally, we want to identify people who could live in the community if they had the proper supports and services. In short, we monitor to ensure legal compliance with respect to the rights and safety of residents.

What we discover during monitoring visits is unpredictable and may warrant follow up work with individuals, families, vendors and state agencies. Monitoring visits may also reveal the need for further investigation of an issue.

Our Goals for Systemic Change

- People with disabilities will receive appropriate services in a safe environment.
- Individuals with disabilities will have opportunities to participate in activities and work that are important to them.
- People with disabilities will receive the proper supports that will allow them to live in their community.

Our Work in 2019

- DLC will monitor places where people with disabilities live or receive services including but not limited to state-operated and private psychiatric facilities; including hospitals with designated psychiatric units & their emergency rooms, DOC controlled facility Bridgewater State Hospital, Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with I/DD, Neuromedical/TBI facilities, juvenile justice facilities, group homes, nursing homes, day habilitation facilities, and segregated work environments.
- DLC will monitor public, private, therapeutic and residential schools serving students with disabilities.
- DLC will monitor death reviews from DDS and DMH.

Target Population

Our work will benefit hundreds of adults and children with disabilities living in facilities whose rights must be identified and protected.

Funding: PAIDD, PAIMI, PAIR, PATBI, PABSS, MLAC

Keep People Safe in Facilities and Community by Investigating Deaths and Serious Allegations of Abuse and Neglect

People with disabilities who live in facilities and the community are particularly vulnerable to the risks of abuse and/or neglect, especially those that cannot report the abuse and neglect themselves. Cuts in funding and services impact both the quality and level of care that individuals receive, increasing the risks of abuse and neglect. In situations where we believe serious abuse or neglect may have occurred, we conduct an investigation. The investigation is a thorough examination of information, records, evidence and circumstances surrounding the allegation of abuse and neglect. Investigations are distinct from advocacy and require a significant allocation of time and resources for activities such as interviewing witnesses, gathering evidence, and generating a written report that may or may not be released publicly. Because of our limited resources, we focus on investigations where the outcome may be systemic change resulting in a better quality of care for large groups of people with disabilities. Our monitoring efforts can and do reveal the need to conduct investigations, but we also initiate investigations based upon complaints we receive. This means investigations are more reactionary, providing us less ability to predict or control the work except by adjusting and modifying other investigations and other work so that we can take on the extremely compelling case even when we are at full capacity.

Our Work in 2019

Investigations in facilities are opened in response to specific reports of abuse, neglect, and/or death. DLC monitors death reports submitted monthly by the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Services. Each year, we investigate as many reports as our resources will allow. We use the following criteria to determine which reports we will investigate:

- Nature and pervasiveness of the problem, including location and/or the vendor, whether there is a death or serious injury, what triggered the allegation, how long the problem has persisted, the impact on other people with disabilities in the same or similar environments (whether the problem is indicative of a larger systemic problem), and whether accepting the case for investigation presents the opportunity for systems reform.
- Whether this is a primary or secondary investigation, potential policy violations and implications, and the potential relief sought.
- DLC will investigate systemic patterns of DMH improperly confining individuals in facilities who are no longer in need of hospital-level care.

Target Population

Our work will benefit hundreds of people with disabilities living in facilities whose rights must be identified and protected to ensure they are safe and free from abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Funding: PAIDD, PAIMI, PAIR, PATBI, MLAC

Ensure Representative Payees Perform their Duties Satisfactorily and Protect Beneficiaries from Misuse

After an organizational representative payee that employed beneficiaries with developmental disabilities was accused and later found in serious violation of labor and anti-discrimination laws and of housing beneficiaries in substandard housing, Congress and the Social Security Administration (SSA) sought to quickly uncover any similar situations which might exist. The SSA Representative Payee Review Project was originally developed in 2009 to allow SSA to learn more about a sample of organizational employer-payees which SSA had not recently reviewed and which were not subject to periodic monitoring by SSA. Because of the urgency of the concern that there may be other beneficiaries employed by payees vulnerable to mistreatment, SSA enlisted the aid of the state-designated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) organizations to assist in review of additional employers that serve as a beneficiary's payee in their respective states.

In 2018, a new Protection and Advocacy program was created by Congress. This program is called the Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries with Representative Payees (PABRP) program. Under the PABRP program, DLC is assigned beneficiary reviews by SSA and is required to engage in statewide site visits to beneficiaries' homes, residential facilities, and state institutions to conduct face-to-face interviews, financial record reviews, and educational visits.

The goal of the project is to ensure payees are performing their payee duties satisfactorily and to protect beneficiaries from misuse.

Our Work in 2019

- Schedule, conduct and complete detailed reports on compliance reviews of both organizational and individual representative payees as assigned by SSA under the PABRP program.
- Develop and implement trainings, educational materials, and corrective action plans to assist representative payees in conforming to requirements specified by SSA.
- Identify and analyze trends in data from investigations and monitoring activities to determine if they present systemic issues which may be appropriate for DLC to address.

Target Population

Organizational and individual Representative Payees identified by SSA for review to ensure SSI/SSDI beneficiaries with Representative Payees are free from financial abuse and neglect.

Funding: PABRP

Information, Referral and Training

Knowing your rights can empower people with disabilities to get the services or help they need. For this reason and because we do not have enough resources to represent everyone who contacts us, DLC provides information, advice and/or written materials to every eligible caller. As part of our established protocols, our goal is to provide all P&A-eligible callers some level of information and referral (I&R) when their issue falls outside our priorities and/or we don't have the capacity to take their case. DLC provides training on disability rights including special education, resident/patient rights in facility settings, anti-discrimination laws in housing and employment, mental health laws, benefits, voting rights, and self-advocacy. We offer training to groups across the state that builds advocacy skills and knowledge of specific areas of law. DLC also provides

extensive technical assistance to legal services professionals and legislative staff who call us daily requesting information and advice on a number of issues impacting people with disabilities.

Requests for trainings can be submitted online at DLC-MA.ORG.

Funding: PAIDD, PAIMI, PAIR, PAAT, PATBI, PAVA, PABSS, MLAC, Discrimination

Legally-Based Systems Advocacy

DLC advocates for the interests of people with disabilities mostly through systemic reform in the courts and other legal forums. This is the work that is tied to our priorities that is not included in our core function of addressing abuse and neglect, which is our primary priority. The work described below includes the cases we take to represent a limited number of individuals as well lawsuits we file to address widespread legal violations. The priorities for the types of cases we will take are as follows:

1. Human Rights
2. Education
 - a. Ensure students with disabilities remain in the classroom
 - b. Ensure that students with disabilities attend school free from abuse, including abusive interventions
 - c. Transition from higher education to work
3. Access to Employment
4. People with Disabilities will Retain Housing in the Community
5. Health Care
6. Community Inclusion
7. Self-determination
 - a. Voting
 - b. Supported Decision Making
8. Community Legal Aid for Victims of Crimes
9. Policy and Communication
 - a. Build Policy Expertise
 - b. Build Partnerships
 - c. Build Positive Images of People with Disabilities
 - d. Empower People to be their Own Advocates

1. Human Rights

Access to basic human rights becomes elusive for people with disabilities in some situations. People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing continue to have significant difficulty obtaining effective communication in the most basic settings where communication is essential, such as when communicating with law enforcement agents. Some people with developmental disabilities are denied the right to communication entirely. They aren't even assessed to see if a communication device would allow them to have a voice of their own. Human rights are also hard to access when an individual is residing and receiving services in a facility despite the rules and regulations that require them. There continue to be serious violations in facilities, and the system that is available to address these violations is woefully inadequate.

Goal for Systemic Change

People who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing and law enforcement agencies throughout the state will understand the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community's right to effective communication with law enforcement.

People with disabilities living in group homes and state psychiatric facilities will know their rights and will have access to an effective human rights officer and complaint process.

Our Work in 2019

- DLC will evaluate cases for systemic litigation when an individual who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing encounter barriers related to communication access when interacting with law enforcement.
- DLC will accept cases involving complaints of abuse and neglect, serious and systemic violations of human rights of individuals with mental health disabilities residing in facilities and individuals with developmental disabilities.
- DLC will systemically address issues where there is system-wide failure to provide individuals with disabilities access to AT/AAC devices that allow individuals to communicate.
- DLC will investigate the inadequacies of the DMH complaint process to address serious human rights complaints.

Target Population

The population that will benefit from this work will be individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, people committed to psychiatric facilities and individuals with developmental disabilities.

Funding: PAIDD, PAIMI, PAAT

2. Education

Ensure Students with Disabilities Remain in the Classroom

Students with disabilities are excluded from school more often than students without disabilities. This happens for many reasons, but one that can be monitored, investigated and changed is a school's use of excessive disciplinary suspensions. Excessive use of harsh discipline policies and practices often result in significant loss of academic progress for students with disabilities. According to a 2017 study published by The Civil Rights Project of the University of California, students with disabilities in Massachusetts are excluded from school three times as many days due to suspension than students without disabilities. This report also

lists the top ten schools in Massachusetts who exclude students with disabilities the most and several of these schools suspend students with disabilities 7 to 8 times as many days as students without disabilities.

These practices occur despite federal and state laws that prohibit schools from suspending students for behaviors related to their disabilities. They also violate laws that require schools to appropriately educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, regardless of the severity of their disability, behaviors, or the services they require to make progress.

Our Goals for Systemic Change

Schools will change their practices and support inclusion for all students with disabilities.

Schools will follow the laws that prohibit and regulate out-of-school exclusion and that require legally appropriate special education services, including behavioral support, in the school setting.

Our Work in 2019

Prevent future illegal exclusions by educating schools and parents about laws that prohibit and regulate out-of-school exclusions and about resources for high-quality behavioral services.

Monitor, investigate and report on three school systems and/or charter schools that are known to have the highest percentages of disciplinary exclusions of students with disabilities in order to deter future illegal exclusions.

Target Population

Students with disabilities who are excluded from school for reasons related to their disability will benefit from work on this priority.

A student served by this priority is likely to be minority, low-income, and/or living in a rural area. This is because schools with high populations of students with those characteristics are more likely than schools in higher-wealth areas to suspend and exclude students with disabilities and not provide required services due to limitations on resources. Furthermore, families with those characteristics have more limited access to services and resources that support self-advocacy.

Funding: PAIDD, PAIR, PAIMI, PAAT, MLAC

Ensure That Students With Disabilities Attend School Free From Abusive Interventions

Many students with disabilities are subject to abuse at school. This includes physical and emotional abuse by school staff and the use of seclusion and restraint. As our previous investigations have shown, one study concluded that one in three children with an identified disability receiving special education services is a victim of neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse.

This problem is compounded by reporting and exclusion issues. Many children with disabilities are unable to report abuse because of communication challenges. In addition, the abuse goes undetected and unreported because the students attend school in segregated settings, including separate schools and self-contained classrooms.

Our Goals for Systemic Change

Use of the Waiver allowing Prone (face-down) restraint will be eliminated in all public schools.

Segregated classrooms and segregated schools for students with disabilities will have appropriate and adequate monitoring and oversight to prevent and address physical and emotional abuse by school staff.

School staff will be required to document all instances of seclusion/time out or restraint.

Our Work in 2019

Monitor up to 5 schools for compliance with new restraint and seclusion regulations, with a focus on eliminating the excessive use of restraints and ensure use of seclusion is limited to the proper environment.

Investigate three allegations of abuse in segregated public and/or private schools.

Identify policies or practices that need to be reported and changed.

Target Populations

The main beneficiaries will be the students who are subjected to the use of restraint, seclusion, and other abusive interventions in public and private residential schools. These are students with more involved needs, particularly students with significant autism or with multiple disabilities, and students in racial/ethnic minorities.

Funding: PAIDD, PAIMI, PAIR

Transition From Higher Education To Work

Transitioning from college to employment can be a challenge for anyone, but students with disabilities will never be successful unless they can obtain an education free from discrimination. College students with disabilities can face many more challenges obtaining the accommodations they need, and colleges have a different system for requesting accommodations than most students and their parents experience in high school. DLC will provide information that helps students who are currently Social Security Beneficiaries better understand what they need to know about their rights to accommodations, how to request them and what to do if they don't get them.

Our Goals for Systemic Change

College Students with Disabilities will have access to the supports and services they need in higher education in order to be successful in obtaining employment upon completion of school.

Our Work in 2019

DLC will accept up to 3 cases where students with disabilities are currently beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI and need an accommodation in their college academic environment.

DLC will provide information and training about how to obtain accommodations in higher education settings.

Target Population

People with disabilities who are Social Security Beneficiaries, but not clients of Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, who are experiencing discrimination based on disability in higher education.

Students with disabilities who are Social Security Beneficiaries, their families and disability professionals seeking information about their rights to accommodations and how to obtain them in higher educational settings.

Funding: PABSS

3. Access to Employment

Having a job and being self-sufficient is an important goal for people with disabilities. Employment helps people with disabilities have money to pay for the things they want and need. People with disabilities often face obstacles in gaining meaningful employment. For example, DLC's monitoring activities and ongoing work in this area reveals the continued reliance on subminimum wage and/or no work opportunities as a default for many individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities, especially those with developmental disabilities continue to be underemployed and underpaid as well as discouraged from working or earning higher wages for fear of losing benefits. People with disabilities may want to return to work but are worried about how working will change their other benefits, especially Social Security benefits.

Our Goals for Systemic Change

- People with disabilities will be employed in meaningful, integrated, competitive employment with any reasonable accommodations necessary to do their jobs.

Our Work in 2019

- Investigate and/or monitor programs that use sub minimum wage waivers (to determine compliance with wage and hour laws) and segregated employment or pre-employment programs.
- Provide training on employment and benefits for individuals and their families as well as disability professionals who need to understand both.
- Enforce the right of individuals to receive employment training in competitive, integrated settings through training, outreach, and education of policymakers.
- DLC will provide information, advice, and referral to individuals who have received a notice of a work-related overpayment from Social Security Administration so they may become self-advocates and avoid future overpayment issues.
- DLC will accept a limited number of cases to provide limited advice and self-advocacy assistance for individuals who are current beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI and have experienced discrimination based on their disability.

Target Populations

- People with disabilities who desire competitive, integrated employment.
- People with disabilities, their family members and disability employment professionals who need adequate information about work incentives, impact on benefits and other resources for finding and keeping competitive employment.
- People with disabilities who are Social Security Beneficiaries who are experiencing discrimination based on disability in the workplace.

Funding: PABSS, PAIDD

4. People with Disabilities Will Retain Housing in the Community

Discrimination due to disability in housing is widespread. Once people with disabilities find housing, they might find they are living in homes that are not accessible for their needs or are denied access to the accommodations they need to continue living in the community.

Our Goal for Systemic Change

People with disabilities in Massachusetts will be able to obtain and/or retain housing by having the accommodations and services they need to remain living in the community.

Our Work in 2019

Provide representation for up to 20 individuals with disabilities and their families living in the United Way of Mass Bay Merrimack Valley area (North Shore, Seacoast Region, Greater Boston and South of Boston) in cases involving housing discrimination based on disability in the following areas:

- Requests and denials of reasonable accommodations
- Evictions for reasons primarily disability-related
- Subsidy termination for reasons which are primarily disability-related
- Stay of execution of eviction when appropriate
- Increase awareness of the rights of people with disabilities to reasonable accommodations and modifications in housing through presentations and factsheets.

Target Population

Individual clients and their families in United Way Mass Bay Merrimack Valley communities will benefit from direct representation, and many more individuals with disabilities will benefit from the self-advocacy skills they develop from trainings and self-help materials DLC provides.

Funding: Discrimination, MLAC

5. Health Care

Access to health care is an important issue for all people but more so for individuals with disabilities. There are many programs that help people obtain health care services and many health care providers that offer those services throughout the state. Access to health care means more than finding the right provider near you. It means finding a provider who is going to understand your access needs and how to provide you with the right accommodations so that you can obtain the health care services available from that provider.

Our Goal for Systemic Change

All people with disabilities have access to the health care services and long term supports and services they need including the accommodations they may need to access those services.

Our Work in 2019

- DLC will provide outreach and training to the Deaf community on their rights to effective communication in health care settings.
- DLC will evaluate cases of individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing who are denied access to

effective communication in health care settings for systemic litigation.

- DLC will work in coalitions to address issues of the Personal Care Attendant (PCA) overtime cap and EVV implementation to ensure individuals are not harmed or institutionalized because of these rules.
- DLC, in collaboration with other disability organizations, will systemically address issues to ensure that all health care providers accepting Medicaid funding will be required to provide accessible exam and diagnostic equipment in all of their health care settings.
- DLC will participate as a member of Commission to Study Switching of Medications.
- DLC, in collaboration with other disability organizations, will address existing barriers that prevent or delay wheelchair repairs and how to eliminate those barriers.
- DLC will develop consumer materials that will promote self-advocacy skills for those needing wheelchair repairs.

Targeted Population

All individuals with disabilities who need access to accommodations and long term supports and services to access health care that allows them to live and work in the community.

Funding: PAIR, MLAC, PABSS, PAAT

6. Community Inclusion

Community inclusion means having access to all the accommodations, supports and services needed to live a meaningful life in the community. People with disabilities need access to barrier-free environments as well as access to accommodations and technology necessary to support meaningful participation in the social and economic aspects of life in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, after 27 years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and much longer for state accessibility laws, there are a number of areas in the community where people with disabilities still have to affirmatively advocate for compliance with the laws and for accommodations necessary to level the playing field so that equal access exists in the community.

Goals for Systemic Change

DLC will ensure that people who have physical disabilities, developmental disabilities and those who are Deaf and Blind have full access to every aspect of society because accommodations and access are readily available throughout the Commonwealth.

Our Work 2019

- DLC will work in collaboration with other disability organizations to ensure that videos posted by Title II and III entities are captioned to ensure access for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- DLC will work in collaboration with other disability organizations to ensure that videos streamed for public consumption are audio described to ensure access for people who are blind or visually impaired.
- DLC will work in collaboration with other disability organizations to ensure that city owned sidewalks with curb cuts are accessible and usable by individuals who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices.
- DLC, in collaboration with other organizations, will work to ensure that all modes of transportation provide accessible options for all users. This includes work related to the para-transit system as well as

emerging on-demand alternatives, such as Uber and LYFT Pilot for Para-transit.

- DLC will continue to serve as a member of the On Demand Transportation Network Task Force – Governor Appointed position.
- DLC will work in collaboration with other disability organizations to ensure that state funded residential, day and employment services for persons with developmental disabilities are operated in a manner consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal directives, such as the CMS HCBS Guidelines.

Target Population

Beneficiaries of this work will be individuals with physical disabilities, developmental disabilities, individuals who are Deaf and hard of hearing and individuals who are Blind or visually impaired. According to census data, there are approximately 700,000 people in Massachusetts who would benefit from systemic advocacy in the areas outlined above.

Funding: PAIR, PAAT, PAIDD, MLAC

7. Self Determination

Self-determination is the process by which a person makes up their own mind about what to think or do without outside influence. For a person with a disability, this means they get to control their own life by expressing their own opinions and making their own decisions. As the Protection and Advocacy organization, DLC has the obligation to assist individuals with disabilities in desired ways to help them obtain and exercise their power to control their lives.

Goal for Systemic Change

As the Protection and Advocacy organization, DLC has the obligation to assist individuals with disabilities in ways that will help them obtain and exercise the power to control their lives. DLC will provide that assistance in the following ways outlined below.

Voting

Voting and political participation are important parts of community living and self-determination. Voting allows people to share their opinions and help make decisions on important community issues. Sometimes, discrimination can get in the way when people with disabilities try to vote. Voting information or polling locations may not be accessible, or a person with a disability may be told that he or she is not allowed to vote even if they really are allowed. People with disabilities also need information about how to register to vote, how to get information about the elections that are happening locally, statewide and nationally so they can use their power to Vote. That is why DLC is the convener of the REV UP! Project in Massachusetts. This project is a collaboration with other disability related organizations to ensure that people with disabilities have the education and information to vote.

Goal For Systemic Change:

Ensure that all people with disabilities will be able to register to vote, have access to educational materials about elections and an equal opportunity to vote at all polls throughout the state.

Our Work in 2019

- DLC will continue its work with the REV UP Mass campaign and maintain the Revupma.org website to ensure access to voting continues to be a priority among disability and other advocacy groups
- DLC will contract with the Independent Living Centers on Election Days to survey polling locations throughout the Commonwealth.
- DLC will continue to support civic participation trainings, in collaboration with our DD Network partners, offered by MASS self-advocates in five regions of the state.
- DLC will ensure people in facilities will be able to register to vote and have the opportunity to vote in local, state, and national elections.
- DLC will work to build relationships with national and regional voting organizations to provide a disability perspective.

Target Population: All individuals with disabilities who want to register to vote, participate in the political process and use their power to vote as well as become better educated about local, statewide and national elections.

Funding: PAVA, PAIDD

Supported Decision Making

Guardianship is the substitution of one person's decision-making for someone else's, and for some people with disabilities, this can be the most egregious denial of self-determination. Promoting self-determination—the ability to make decisions and take actions to shape one's own life—is fundamental to our purpose as a P&A. We need to work in collaboration with self-advocates to design alternatives to guardianship, such as Supported Decision Making, that supports the decision-making capabilities of people with disabilities.

Our Goals for Systemic Change

Individuals subjected to guardianships will have an alternative that they may choose instead so that they are making the decisions with the support of people they choose to assist them in gathering the information they need to make important decisions in their life. Their final decisions will be respected and honored by all.

Our Work in 2019

- DLC will work in collaboration with our DD Network Partners to join a growing number of states with legislative recognition of supported decision-making as an alternative to guardianship.
- DLC will support the MASS Supported Decision Making Task Force to ensure they have access to all they need to educate and inform their membership about the benefits of supported decision making.
- DLC will educate family members, policy makers and service provider professionals on alternatives to guardianship.

Target Population

This work will benefit individuals with developmental disabilities under guardianship or who are threatened with guardianship who desire increased self-determination.

Funding: PAIDD, MLAC

8. Civil Legal Aid for Victims of Crimes

The Disability Law Center has a new project focused on representation of individuals with disabilities who are victims of a crime **when** the issue they need help with is directly related to the crime they experienced. Individuals with disabilities who are a victim of a crime should call DLC to see if we have the capacity to provide legal assistance.

Goal for Systemic Change

Individuals with Disabilities will have access to individual representation because they are victims of a crime that had resulted in a need for individual legal representation.

Our Work 2019

Based on limited capacity, DLC will accept cases for representation and/or information or referral if the issue is related to the crime the individual has experienced, including but not limited to:

- Housing
- Employment
- Public Accommodations
- Health Care
- Community Inclusion

Target Population

Individuals with disabilities who are victims of crimes and the discrimination issue is related directly to the crime they experienced.

Funding: MLAC

9. Policy and Communication

DLC has an obligation to help the general public understand the rights of people with disabilities. DLC will continue to help policy makers understand the rights of people with disabilities and let people with disabilities know about current laws and other programs.

Build Policy Expertise

DLC will continue to be a resource on disability-related policy for people with disabilities, policy makers and the general public. DLC will make sure that people with disabilities have a chance to express their opinion and that policy makers are aware of how a decision will impact the disability community. DLC will focus on key issues such as the prevention of abuse and neglect.

Build Partnerships

DLC will continue existing partnerships with other disability organizations, with a primary focus on collaborating with organizations made up of and led by people with disabilities. Examples of partnership-building activities include participating in coalitions, workgroups and task forces and building relationships with other agencies and organizations.

Build Positive Images of People with Disabilities

DLC will help build positive images of people with disabilities by sharing positive stories through traditional media (newspapers, television and radio) and social media (Facebook and Twitter), and on the agency website. These efforts will focus on helping individuals with disabilities and the general public better understand the rights of and reducing stigma against people with disabilities. DLC will help the media understand how best to present information on issues that impact people with disabilities.

Empower People to be their Own Advocates

DLC will work with the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Council, Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong, and other disability groups to help individuals better understand their rights and how to be their own advocates. DLC will do this by writing helpful guides, providing trainings for people with disabilities, and by collaborating with organizations made up of and led by people with disabilities.

Funding: PAIDD, PAIMI, PAIR, PAAT, PAVA, PABSS, PATBI, MLAC