Greetings from the MWLS Team

I hope everyone is staying healthy as we all settle into our new virtual reality. MWLS is open and fully operational with our staff working remotely serving our clients. The COVID-19 pandemic is something that we will always remember as a significant event in our lives that caused us to alter our way of life like never before. My 96-year-old mother can recall the polio epidemic and heard of or knew relatives affected by the Spanish flu of 1918, but for most of us, this is a first.

As with all crises, we are working hard to respond to the needs of our client communities as they face uncertainty due to the loss of a job, trouble paying their rent, fear for their safety due to having to shelter in place with an abuser, trying to navigate filing for unemployment benefits when technology cannot keep up with the volume, and many other challenges. We are closely watching all legislative developments that impact our clients and posting any information and updates on the COVID-19 page on our website at www.mwlegal.org. We have reimagined ways to do our work, embracing technology more than ever, and look forward to the next set of challenges we will face when we return to some form of normalcy.

It is a strange time and I know the MWLS staff miss seeing and interacting with each other and our clients on a daily basis. We now see each other on computer screens through the magic of Zoom or participate in group chats through Teams and other software programs.

While it works, it is not the way we are used to doing our work. The most important thing to remember is that our staff is continuing to serve our clients and accept new clients. Providing information and advice to those most vulnerable gives people some sense of reassurance during these uncertain times.

Stay well,

Betsy Soule
Executive Director
When I retired from teaching at Boston University in 2018 I knew I wanted to use my time to do volunteer work at a legal aid office. For several years, I had been reading newspaper accounts of the treatment of immigrants trying to enter this country and of their legal vulnerability upon arrival. The policies being put in place struck me as shameful.

As with so many people I know, a kind of low-level depression set in as I read these stories, like a toothache or low-grade fever. How could this be happening in our country? What could I do?

My call to MetroWest Legal Services was a response to this weird political depression. I first spoke to Rebecca Deans-Rowe, who responded to my offer to volunteer with a metaphor that has stayed with me. “We can always use more hands on deck,” she said. “Please come in!” Metrowest Legal Services is like a ship with a crew that never stops working. Once I became involved, both through helping out and through donations, I felt my spirits rising.

The reason for the uplift is obvious: I saw really effective action being taken to remedy injustice. I was learning new things about the way the law can work, not just against but for immigrants and others faced with civil injustice. I was elated to discover that here was a place where even a small cash donation goes a very long way.

It turns out that the uplifting effect of volunteering on my state of mind is very common. Research shows that volunteering has health benefits, mental and physical, especially on people over 65. You can read about this research online at the Mayo Clinic and Harvard University. But they only tell you what you already intuitively know: that dedication to something beyond yourself can lead to surprising personal benefits.

We are grateful for Professor Brown’s contributions as a writer and editor. She brings an incredible combination of professional skill and compassion to her work in chronicling client success stories.

MWLS
The Donor Experience

Robert Molloy
Chief Administrative Officer
General Counsel & Secretary
Destination XL Group, Inc

This June, it will be 21 years since I first met leadership at Metrowest Legal Services in Framingham, MA. Ever since that day, I have been hooked -- I could not have imagined at the outset that an organization serving those who have no or little voice could achieve so much with so few financial resources. That is why I give, I cheerlead, and I care so much about everyone in the organization and their selfless dedication to providing access to justice.

Executive Director Betsy Soule and her team unflinchingly assist as many of the most vulnerable people in their service area as they can. What better way can one invest his or her charitable funds than to support the free legal services MetroWest provides? They work to protect and advance the rights of the poor, elderly, disabled and other disenfranchised people in their service area, and to assist them in obtaining legal, social and economic justice.

In the past 21 years, Metrowest has expanded the services they provide to include: education, assistance to victims of domestic abuse and senior citizens, immigration assistance, health advocacy, an active pro bono program, help for unrepresented litigants and a medical-legal partnership. With over 40,000 people living in MetroWest’s service area considered impoverished, the demand for MetroWest’s services continues to grow. While they assist close to 3,000 people a year, they are forced to turn away eligible clients every day due to the tremendous need for funding.

Won’t you please join me and support Metrowest?

Our donors make so much possible for our clients. We thank Bob Molloy for his continued support and enthusiasm.

MWLS
**Why Legal Aid Matters More Than Ever**

So many of us are feeling the strain of these unsettled times, but with so much uncertainty in the world, there is something the MWLS staff know for sure: the most vulnerable people in our communities will suffer the most.

These are the people we serve every day. The elderly, disabled, and low-income residents of MetroWest have turned to us for over four decades to help with a variety of daily challenges and issues that resolve more quickly and with better results when an attorney provides advice or takes their case.

The COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a public health crisis, and we grieve for the suffering of so many in our communities. In addition to assisting with access to healthcare, we are acutely aware of how the economic impact will leave many residents in dire circumstances. We anticipate an increase in evictions, foreclosures, bankruptcies, and unemployment claims. It is also a sad fact that stay-at-home orders make domestic violence situations even worse, and we have already observed this tragic effect.

The clouds continue to gather, and we can see the storm of need coming on the horizon. In a time of great global sorrow, philanthropy is where we find the blue sky. We are here to help, but your kindness and generosity are so critical as the demand for our services increases in the coming months and years. Please consider making a DONATION or, if you are an attorney, joining our Pro Bono Initiative.

**Your gift matters - now more than ever.**

Wishing you good health and blue skies ahead,

Rebecca Deans-Rowe  
Development Manager