



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids/ MHAP for Kids

What is Health Law Advocates?

Health Law Advocates (HLA) is a non-profit public interest law firm whose mission is to provide *pro bono* legal representation to low-income residents experiencing difficulty accessing or paying for needed medical services. HLA is committed to ensuring universal access to quality health care in Massachusetts, particularly for those who are most at risk due to such factors as race, gender, disability, age, immigration status or geographic location. With its partner organization, Health Care For All, HLA combines legal expertise with grassroots organizing and policy reform to advance the statewide movement for universal health care access.

What is the MHAP for Kids?

HLA's Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids (MHAP for Kids) improves the health and increases educational success of children with unmet mental health needs at risk for possible or further court involvement, by advocating to improve access to needed mental health services. It achieves this goal by implementing a sustainable and replicable advocacy program, initially in two Family Resource Centers (FRCs). Two designated Staff Attorneys serve the Lowell and Lynn FRCs, advocating for up to 60 youth total at a time. This project builds on HLA attorneys' ten years of experience serving as Mental Health Advocates and Mental Health Guardians *ad Litem* (GAL) in Juvenile Courts in Central Massachusetts, Boston, Lowell, Lynn, and Salem.

What is a MHAP for Kids Staff Attorney?

A MHAP for Kids Staff Attorney is a highly qualified attorney who advocates for mental health services to divert children from possible or further court involvement. A MHAP for Kids Staff Attorney conducts an inquiry into a child's circumstances in order to ascertain what the child needs in terms of mental health care and to advocate appropriately. A MHAP for Kids Staff Attorney works directly with agencies, including schools in order to ensure that a child receives appropriate and needed services.

Why would a child need a MHAP for Kids Staff Attorney?

There is a high rate of major mental illness among children in the juvenile justice system and many of these children are not receiving mental health services. An independent evaluation of HLA's advocacy for court-involved youth in 2015 and 2016 found that 90% of the children we served had already been diagnosed with one or more mental illness and 81% had experienced a barrier to mental health treatment. The evaluation also found that a high percentage of the children we served needed emergency, inpatient and/or residential treatment. To keep these children at home, rather than in foster care system or in juvenile detention, there must be services available and advocates to help them and their families access mental health services.

How can I make a referral to MHAP for Kids?

Referrals to MHAP for Kids may be made by the FRCs to the on-site Staff Attorney as well as through the intake line 617-275-2919. The Program Director will review all referrals to make sure they are complete and appropriate for case intake.

Do you offer consultations or trainings to inform others about your work?

Yes. We would be happy to speak with you about trainings or consultations. If you have any other questions about the MHAP for Kids, please contact Marisol Garcia, Program Director at mgarcia@hla-inc.org or 617-275-2917.

How is the MHAP for Kids work funded?

MHAP for Kids is generously supported by grants from The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, The C.F. Adams Trust, The Ludcke Foundation, The Theodore Edson Parker Foundation, The John W. Alden Trust, The Massachusetts Bar Foundation and The Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation. Generous support for this work has also been provided by Boston Children's Hospital and Hagens Berman Sobol Shapiro LLP and many more corporate and individual sponsors.

Health Law Advocates, Inc. • 1 Federal St, 5th Floor • Boston, MA 02110 •

www.healthlawadvocates.org • T: 617-275-2919, F: 617-338-5242