



## 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 improve access to health care for Massachusetts residents. HLA pursues its mission primarily by providing free legal representation to people whose incomes are below 300% of the federal poverty threshold and who are experiencing difficulty accessing or paying for needed health care 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 MHAP for Kids improves the health and educational success of children with unmet mental health needs who are at risk for possible or further court involvement, by providing legal assistance to improve access to needed mental health services. MHAP for Kids legal services are provided to families statewide by 12 Staff Attorneys who are based in Family Resource Centers (FRCs) across the state. These attorneys are based in FRCs in Boston, Brockton, Everett, Fitchburg, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Quincy, and Worcester.

#### **What is a MHAP for Kids Staff Attorney?**

A MHAP for Kids Staff Attorney is a highly qualified attorney who advocates for access to mental health services that improve health outcomes for families, increase educational success for children, and divert youth from the juvenile justice system. By working with state agencies, school systems, and insurance carriers, a MHAP for Kids Staff Attorney ensures that a child receives appropriate mental health care.

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

Many children enter, or are at risk of entering, the juvenile justice system because they have unmet mental health needs. Untreated mental illness, including conditions that are trauma-related, can lead to truancy, running away from home, inability to abide by the rules of the home, and even delinquent behavior -- all of which are triggers to juvenile court involvement. Children's mental health needs often go unmet because of systemic barriers to treatment, which the juvenile justice system is not best-equipped to address. The long-term effects of untreated mental illness in youth can include, among other tragic circumstances, incarceration, school disenrollment, long-term disability, and suicide.

The MHAP for Kids attorneys provide legal assistance to children so they may overcome steep obstacles to mental health care. These specially trained lawyers work with school systems, state agencies, and health insurance companies, as well as health care providers, and the juvenile justice system to ensure children receive the mental health services to which they are entitled.

#### **How can I make a referral to MHAP for Kids?**

Referrals to MHAP for Kids may be made by the FRC to the on-site Staff Attorney or by others in the community through the statewide intake line: 617-275-2919. MHAP for Kids Director/Managing Attorney Marisol Garcia reviews 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. One avenue for MHAP for Kids to provide trainings and consultations is through the MassHealth DSRIP TA program. If you have any other questions about MHAP for Kids, please contact Marisol Garcia, Director/ Managing Attorney at [mgarcia@hla-inc.org](mailto:mgarcia@hla-inc.org) or 617-275-2917.