

Temporary Mailing Address:
PO Box 590100
Newton, MA 02459

Permanent Address:
One Federal Street, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02110

617-338-5241
888-211-6168 (TOLL FREE)

617-338-5242 (FAX)

www.healthlawadvocates.org

Board of Directors

Mala M. Rafik, PRESIDENT
Brian P. Carey, TREASURER
Lisa Fleming, CLERK
Ugonma N. Chukwueke
Michael S. Dukakis
Ruth Ellen Fitch
Paula Gold
Joshua Greenberg
Dennis G. Heaphy
Daniel J. Jackson
Wendy E. Parmet
Amy Rosenthal
Lauren A. Smith
Eleanor H. Soeffing

Staff

Matt Selig
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Torie Argus
STAFF ATTORNEY

Sarah Clark
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Andrew P. Cohen
SUPERVISING ATTORNEY

Sandy Eid
AMERICORPS FELLOW

Marisol Garcia
DIRECTOR/MANAGING ATTORNEY

Kara Hurvitz
STAFF ATTORNEY

Jennifer Javier
MANAGER OF EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

Toni Kokenis
STAFF ATTORNEY

Justin J. Lowe
LEGAL DIRECTOR

Michaela MacQuarrie
PARALEGAL

Lisa Morrow
SENIOR SUPERVISING ATTORNEY

Eliza L.M. Presson
STAFF ATTORNEY/TRAINING COORDINATOR

Katherine Purrington
STAFF ATTORNEY

David O. Satin
STAFF ATTORNEY

Mara Shulman
STAFF ATTORNEY

Hannah Singer
INTAKE COORDINATOR

Shannon C. Sullivan
PARALEGAL/INTAKE COORDINATOR

Alexandra Warren
EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS FELLOW

Wells Wilkinson
SENIOR STAFF ATTORNEY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Friday, December 4th, 2020

Contact Information:

Marisol Garcia
Director / Managing Attorney
Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids
Health Law Advocates
978-421-6796
mgarcia@hla-inc.org

PRESS RELEASE:

**Press Statement from Marisol Garcia, Director of Health Law
Advocates' Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids on the Final
Budget for FY'21:**

Boston. – Today, the Massachusetts Legislature bolstered areas most impacted by COVID-19 by passing the Final Budget for FY'21. The budget made important investments for some of the most vulnerable in the Commonwealth: children. The state allocated \$950,000 for Health Law Advocates' Mental Health Advocacy Program (MHAP) for Kids. MHAP for Kids is a program offered through the Department of Children and Families' Family Resource Centers (FRCs), to ensure that children with high risk factors receive critical mental health services.

“We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Senate President Karen Spilka, Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo, Senator Cindy Friedman, Representative Kay Khan and the members of the Conference Committee for championing mental healthcare for the most vulnerable residents of the Commonwealth,” said Marisol Garcia, Director of MHAP for Kids at Health Law Advocates.

“Addressing trauma early is the most effective form of treatment we can provide a child,” said Senator Friedman, Vice Chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. “Children too often bear the brunt of our system’s gaps in access to quality mental health care – that’s why it is so important that we fund successful programs like MHAP so that we can help families and children that are facing the greatest need.”

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a severe threat to children’s mental health as well as access to mental health services for children, and the legislature understands that addressing these issues should be a priority during these times. MHAP for Kids improves the mental health of youth with unmet

mental health needs by providing these children with an attorney trained in removing barriers to treatment.

According to the report Protecting our Children’s Wellbeing During COVID-19, issued by the Childhood Trauma Task Force in June 2020, youth experiencing trauma and in need of mental health services are particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact on children of an increase of economic insecurity, abuse or neglect, loss of loved ones, social inequities, disrupted education, social isolation as well as underlying mental health conditions demonstrate the need for robust advocacy services like those offered by Health Law Advocates’ Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids and funds to expand the program statewide.

“So many parents of black and brown kids with special needs are in the dark; these kids are unseen and unheard. MHAP for Kids’ is a light in that darkness and a voice for those families. Statewide funding means that light can shine brighter and farther,” Fabienne Eliacin, a former client of the program said.

“HLA’s staff attorneys will serve hundreds of families in the next year. Like many other mental health advocates, we expect an increase in children’s behavioral and mental health issues as well as lower academic performance due to the pandemic that can extend beyond the crisis. As the FY’21 Final Budget goes to Governor Baker, we strongly advocate that Massachusetts continue investing in access to mental health care,” added Garcia.

MHAP for Kids – COVID-19 Response

A profile of the children MHAP for Kids has served since Governor Baker declared a state of emergency:

- 66% live in a city/town in the top 30 for highest COVID-19 rates¹
- 66% identify as a person of color
- 97% identified with mental health diagnosis at the time of MHAP for Kids intake
- One in five have an open juvenile delinquency matter
- One in six have an open Child Requiring Assistance Petition
- Average household income = 114% of the FPL (\$29,000 for a family of four)

¹