



**Paula M. Carey**  
CHIEF JUSTICE

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
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PROBATE AND FAMILY COURT DEPARTMENT  
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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**PROBATE AND FAMILY COURT ANNOUNCES RELEASE OF  
ONLINE CHILD SUPPORT DOCUMENT ASSEMBLY MODULE**

The Probate and Family Court, the Massachusetts Justice Project and collaborators today announced the availability of a new online resource that will help self-represented litigants more easily complete court forms in child support cases. The other partners are the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute; South Coastal Counties Legal Services, Inc.; and the Trial Court Access to Justice Initiative.

With the help of a Technology Initiative Grant from the Legal Services Corporation, the Massachusetts Justice Project, in collaboration with the Probate & Family Court and the other partners, has created a series of free online interviews that help self-represented litigants accurately complete the court forms needed to file cases seeking establishment, enforcement or modification of a child support order, or an Answer to any of these complaints.

The interviews, supporting educational videos and written content can be accessed at <http://www.masslegalhelp.org/legal-forms>. Users proceed through a series of questions, and the answers to the questions are used to prepare forms and instructions. A Spanish translation of these interviews will be available this summer.

"Making sure children receive financial support from their parents is one of the most important types of cases the Probate and Family Court hears," said Probate and Family Court Chief Justice Paula M. Carey. "Creating this online resource in collaboration with the Massachusetts Justice Project and others will improve access to the court for parents in child support cases, increasing the likelihood that children get the financial support they need,"

Each year, thousands of litigants unable to afford an attorney seek to represent themselves in the Massachusetts Probate and Family Court. Online interviews allow self-represented litigants to quickly and accurately prepare essential legal forms via an easily accessible online interface.

“With funding down nearly 30% for Massachusetts legal aid programs over the last five years, creating an easy-to-use tool for low-income persons to complete court forms necessary to access the legal system has become an important component of the work of legal aid,” said Gordon Shaw, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Justice Project.

The Massachusetts Probate and Family Court is among an increasing number of courts around the country partnering with legal aid programs to develop online document assembly interviews to increase and improve access to the courts. The use of free, user-friendly online forms is achieved through LawHelp Interactive, a national document assembly project run by ProBono.Net, a nonprofit dedicated to increasing access to justice. LawHelp Interactive is used in 41 states, Guam, and Canada to power online forms for those without lawyers, pro bono attorneys, and legal aid lawyers, as well as court-based self-help centers. Since 2005, LawHelp Interactive has assembled over 1.3 million documents.

#### **About the Massachusetts Probate and Family Court**

The Massachusetts Probate and Family Court is one of seven departments of the Massachusetts Trial Court. The mission of the Probate and Family Court is “To deliver timely justice to the public by providing equal access to a fair, equitable, and efficient forum to resolve family and probate legal matters and to assist and protect all individuals, families, and children in an impartial and respectful manner.”

Website: <http://www.mass.gov/courts/courtsandjudges/courts/probateandfamilycourt/index.html>

#### **About the Massachusetts Justice Project**

The Massachusetts Justice Project is a federally-funded civil legal services program that functions as part of an integrated legal services delivery system in central and western Massachusetts. MJP is supported almost entirely by a Legal Services Corporation grant. Its mission is to assist low income clients in acquiring and preserving the basic necessities of life and to advance the rights of otherwise unrepresented people by improving their access to the justice system and their ability to represent themselves.

Website: <http://www.majp.org/>

#### **About the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute**

The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute is the statewide poverty law and policy institute whose mission is to advance economic, racial and social justice through legal action, advocacy and public information. MLRI advocates for systemic reforms to policies and practices that harm people living in poverty and works to ensure that the fundamental needs of traditionally underserved, low-income populations are met. In addition, MLRI serves as the statewide support center for local and regional legal services providers and advocacy organizations. MLRI also manages the Massachusetts Legal Information Websites Project providing access to legal information on a wide variety of legal topics that affect low income residents of Massachusetts.

See also: <http://www.masslegalhelp.org/>

Website: <http://www.mlri.org/>

### **About South Coastal Counties Legal Services**

South Coastal Counties Legal Services, Inc. (SCCLS), with its subsidiary the Justice Center of Southeast Massachusetts (Justice Center), is the principal provider of free civil legal assistance to low-income individuals, families, elders, and children in Southeastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod & the Islands. The program's mission is to "achieve equal justice for the poor and disadvantaged through community-based advocacy," with a goal of transforming lives through the provision of quality legal advocacy when families need it most. SCCLS has offices in Hyannis, and Fall River. The Justice Center is located in Brockton. Representation is provided to clients in a wide array of civil matters including : accessing and preserving secure and affordable housing; obtaining and maintaining public benefits; protecting families from domestic violence; ensuring quality educational opportunities for at risk youth; assisting consumers with debt and fraud issues, and in some immigration matters, targeted at obtaining legal status for victims of violence.

Website: <http://sccls.org/>

### **About ProBono.Net**

ProBono.Net is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing access to justice through innovative uses of technology and increased volunteer lawyer participation. Founded in 1998 with support from the Open Society Institute, Pro Bono Net has created a broad and powerful network of nonprofit legal organizations, courts and bar associations across the United States. With 60,000 members and platforms in use in 30 states and Canadian provinces, Pro Bono Net's reach covers approximately two-thirds of the poverty population and lawyers in the United States.

Website: <http://www.probono.net/>

### **About the Legal Services Corporation**

Since 2000, when Congress first appropriated special funds for its Technology Initiative Grants (TIG) program, LSC has been a leader in the development and use of technology to more effectively meet the legal needs of low-income Americans. TIG has supported projects to develop, test and replicate technologies that improve client access to high quality legal information and pro se assistance. It has also helped programs enhance their overall information technology infrastructure. These projects use a broad range of technologies -- including mobile, cloud computing, big data, and automated document assembly -- to make the delivery of legal services in the United States more efficient and effective. Through 2012, LSC has made more than 525 TIG awards, totaling over \$40 million.

Website: <http://tig.lsc.gov/>