

# On September 27, 2017 CLSACC Celebrated the Grand Opening of New Location and the Expansion of Legal Aid and Mental Health



Pictured from left to right: Liza Lunt, President—Board of Directors, Tagesech Wabeto and Nancy Schlachter from the Commission on Immigrant Rights and Citizenship—City of Cambridge, Nasrin Afshar, Mojdeh Rohani, Executive Director, and State Representative Marjorie Decker

With access to justice now more critical than ever, Community Legal Services and Counseling Center (CLSACC) today celebrated the grand opening of its new location in Cambridge and the expansion of its free civil legal aid and affordable psychological counseling services. State Representatives Mike Connolly and Marjorie Decker attended, as well as Cambridge City Councilor Tim Toomey, architect Graham Gund and other local leaders, supporters and volunteers for an open house and tour of the space.

“While we are celebrating CLSACC’s new location, their work in our community has a historic reach that has touched the lives of many by preventing homelessness, keeping families together, achieving safety for victims, and ensuring access to vital mental health services,” said Rep. Marjorie Decker. “Their staff is a lifeline to our neighbors and our community, and I am grateful for their presence and commitment to ensuring the rights and needs of our community are met.”

The new 7,000-square-foot offices are located at 47 Thorndike Street in Cambridge. CLSACC moved to the new location in July, relocating from its longtime offices at One West Street.

Liza Lunt, President of the Board of Directors for CLSACC, said the organization began work several years ago to identify a new space that would meet the growing demand for its free legal assistance and mental health services.

“It was very important to the board that we find a larger space to expand our services and accept more clients, especially with the need for legal aid at an all-time high,” Lunt said. “We’re fortunate to have the support of local leaders and residents, and especially the City of Cambridge, as well as many volunteers and community partners whose goodwill has given us the opportunity to move to a new location that will truly serve the growing needs of our clients.”

CLSACC offers free legal assistance and affordable psychological counseling to low-income people in matters ranging from child custody and domestic violence, to housing and homelessness prevention, disability benefits, and immigration and refugee rights. The organization’s staff and volunteer attorneys and therapists work collaboratively to provide legal and mental health support throughout Greater Boston, and to immigrants and refugees statewide.

More than 1,500 clients benefit from CLSACC’s legal and counseling programs annually. The organization’s services combat the effects of poverty and violence by helping clients and their children meet basic human needs for safety, income, health and housing. CLSACC draws on the expertise of over 120 dedicated volunteer legal and mental health professionals to reach the community's most vulnerable members.

“Many of our clients have experienced substantial trauma in their lives, and they face a combination of varied legal issues and emotional difficulties that are particularly well served by our holistic model of care,” said Mojdeh Rohani, CLSACC’s Executive Director. “Our clients not only receive effective legal assistance, but they are also better able to cope with the enormous struggles they face.”

After decades of operating out of increasingly cramped spaces, CLSACC consolidated its legal and counseling program staff into a larger location on the ground floor of the old Middlesex County Courthouse in Bulfinch Square. [GUND Partnership](#) led the reconstruction and transformation of the nineteenth century building into a modern office space.

Every day, thousands of people with low-incomes try to navigate the legal system without a lawyer. The Legal Services Corporation, the single largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans in the nation, [reported in June](#) that 86 percent of low-income Americans receive inadequate or no professional legal help for the civil legal problems they face. Unlike criminal defendants, parties in civil cases generally do not have a right to representation. A [recent study](#) by the Boston Bar Association found that in Massachusetts civil legal aid programs turn away 64 percent of eligible cases. People seeking assistance with family law cases are turned away 80 percent of the time. Without access to legal advice, many are unaware of their legal rights and potential claims.

“Access to civil legal aid doesn’t just open doors to our justice system – it empowers people with low-incomes to take control of their lives and vastly increases the health and vitality of our communities,” Rohani said. “Our services promote safety and stability by offering our clients a pathway out of poverty and the opportunity to create a better future for themselves and their families.”