Senior Economic Justice Attorney with Focus on Safety Net Programs

The Opportunity: The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) seeks a dynamic and creative senior attorney to take a lead role in legislative and administrative advocacy and impact litigation to improve and protect access to critical safety net programs, including but not limited to SNAP, TANF cash assistance, and subsidized childcare. The attorney will work closely and collaboratively with a team of experienced, nationally respected public benefits and safety net advocates.

This is an opportunity to make a major contribution to an organization known for the effectiveness of its work, the excellence of its staff and a collaborative culture that provides employees with respect, recognition, and opportunities to be innovative and creative.

About MLRI: Founded in 1968, MLRI is a nonprofit poverty law and policy center that provides statewide advocacy and leadership to advance economic, racial, and social justice for low-income people and communities. We pursue systems change through litigation, legislative and administrative advocacy, coalition building, community lawyering, and other strategies to address laws, policies and practices that harm low-income people. MLRI’s advocacy incorporates a racial equity lens and a community-driven framework that values the voices and experiences of people with lived experience of poverty, economic and racial injustice.

MLRI is also the statewide multi-issue poverty law support center in the Massachusetts civil legal aid delivery system; our advocates provide substantive expertise and technical assistance to frontline legal aid field programs and many other providers who serve low-income people and communities in Massachusetts. For more information see www.mlri.org.

About Our Public Benefits Practice: MLRI’s Public Benefits advocates are recognized and respected both statewide and nationally as leading experts in their fields and as thought leaders in benefits-related litigation and policy advocacy. A few recent examples of MLRI Public Benefits successes include the following:

- Legislative. In collaboration with partner organizations, we secured repeal of the state’s welfare "family cap" and the first increases in cash assistance grants in over 20 years, and legislation prohibiting “school meal shaming” practices in Massachusetts schools.
- Litigation. We obtained class wide prospective relief and $14 million in back benefits for over 40,000 low-income households in two SNAP lawsuits.
- Policy advocacy. We persuaded the state to make extensive improvements to the state's online SNAP and cash applications and client notices, streamline SNAP access and enrollment for older adults, expand SNAP eligibility for college students, and make it easier for families to access DTA benefits during COVID.

Over the last decade, MLRI has continued to expand in size, reach and impact. Currently, our annual operating budget is more than $5.5 million and we have 30 staff members. Since 2011 MLRI has been led by Georgia Katsoulomitis, the second executive director in the organization’s 54-year history.
Responsibilities:

• Identify, develop, and implement legislative and administrative advocacy and litigation strategies to improve and protect safety net programs in Massachusetts;
• Provide legal and technical support to legislators, policymakers, local legal services programs, other advocacy and community organizations on safety net issues;
• Help build and lead coalitions of community and grassroots organizations;
• Respond to and work with media on social safety net and poverty law issues;
• Develop and lead workshops and training events for lawyers and community advocates;
• Write amicus briefs, regulatory comments, reports, policy briefs and advocacy manuals as well as shorter advocacy and educational materials and practical information for advocates, policymakers, clients, community members and other key stakeholders;
• Represent MLRI policy interests in public forums, including legislative and rulemaking hearings and on statewide task forces.

Qualifications:

• Law degree and admission to a state bar;
• At least 5 years of relevant experience, including demonstrated litigation experience; legislative experience; and policy advocacy with state and/or federal administrative agencies;
• Experience working with or on behalf of people and communities in poverty is preferred;
• Outstanding writing, legal research, and oral advocacy skills;
• Ability to develop and lead litigation and statewide policy advocacy initiatives;
• Experience working both independently and collaboratively as part of a team;
• Imagination, determination, self-confidence and a passion for MLRI’s mission;
• Ability to flourish in a nonbureaucratic work culture that values creative solutions.

Salary and Benefits:

• MLRI offers a competitive salary relative to other civil legal aid programs in Massachusetts. The Staff Attorney salary scale is based on years of post-JD legal experience and other relevant experience. For example, the salary for 5 years post-JD is $70,000; 15 years is $84,500; 25 years $97,750.
• MLRI provides generous benefits including health, dental, vision, life and disability insurance, 403(b) plan with a 2% employer match, as well as vacation, holiday, and family leave.
• MLRI is committed to a continuous review and updating of salaries and benefits for the entire staff. Salary scales will be updated in 2023.

Applications:

• To apply, please email a cover letter, resume and a legal writing sample to: SrBenefitsAtty@mlri.org;
• Application materials will be reviewed and interviews will be scheduled on a rolling basis; interested and qualified candidates are encouraged to submit application materials promptly.

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

MLRI is an equal opportunity employer. We believe that having an inclusive culture and a staff, board, and volunteers with diverse personal and professional backgrounds and lived experience enhances our ability to meet our mission and creates an environment where all members of our community can thrive. We strongly encourage applications from people of color, women, immigrants, persons with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ community, people with lived experience of poverty, and people from other underrepresented and historically marginalized groups.