



# GREATER BOSTON LEGAL SERVICES

... and justice for all

NEWS

Fall 2017

## After 8 Years of Abuse, a Grandmother Receives Help to Find Sanctuary & Stability

“Huong”, a grandmother from Vietnam, came to the U.S. on a tourist visa in November 2006 to visit her sister, never intending to stay. A few months later she met “Tung” who was very charming. The relationship progressed quickly, and Huong agreed to marry him and stay in the U.S. Tung then promised to petition for his wife to obtain a green card and work authorization, asking her to give him money to apply. Huong gave her husband thousands of dollars for an attorney but Tung continually postponed the application process, even after Huong’s visa expired.

Tung then began to abuse Huong verbally and emotionally. He threatened to call the police to get her arrested or deported if she ever disobeyed him. He also forced Huong to have sex with him and to give him money for gambling. He threatened to hurt her and her family members if she told anyone about his actions.

Huong suffered the abuse



“Huong” endured 8 years of abuse from her husband then GBLS helped her to testify against him. She is now safe and can also remain and work in the U.S., as GBLS helped her to obtain a green card.

for eight years, until October 2015—then it got worse. When Huong learned that her husband had slept with multiple prostitutes, she refused to have sex with him. Tung locked her up in the bedroom without food or water on four separate occasions. The fourth time,

her coworkers became concerned and called the police to check on her. When they arrived, the police had to break through the front door and the bedroom door to rescue Huong. The police arrested Tung and charged

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When no one else can help, GBLS provides free assistance on civil (noncriminal) legal matters to poor people living in Greater Boston who need help obtaining food, income, shelter, and safety.

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## GBLS Receives Grant to Provide Legal Support in Defense of Immigrants

In October 2017 GBLS was one of 10 organizations selected following a competitive application process to receive a grant from the Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund. This initiative stems from a collaborative effort between the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement, Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), and Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) with input from local funders and immigration advocates including GBLS staff. Its goal is to "strengthen the Greater Boston area's capacity to protect and defend its many immigrant communities, refugees, and temporary status holders by increasing education and access to legal services."

"Immigrants are vital members of our society...this grant will enable GBLS to work with community-based organizations and provide needed legal support," said GBLS Executive Director Jacquelynne Bowman. "We are thankful to Mayor Walsh for spearheading this initiative to ensure that Boston remains a welcoming community." Mayor Walsh stated, "Through these funds, organizations will be able to better protect and serve immigrants throughout the Boston area, helping the families, friends and neighbors who contribute so much to our city." Lonnie Powers, Executive Director of MLAC, said, "The Immigrant Defense Fund gives concrete recognition to the overwhelming need for civil legal assistance in communities affected by policy changes at the federal level."

Thank you to Boston Mayor Martin Walsh, MLAC, MLRI, and the very generous foundations and local partners and donors who made this possible!



"Duarte" received assistance from GBLS to recover wages he had earned but his employer did not pay him. His case was successfully resolved, and he recovered \$3,000.

## "Wage Courts" Help Workers Recover over \$62,000 in Wages

Sadly, despite strong wage laws in Massachusetts, workers in the state are all too often victims of wage theft by their employers. Some are paid less than minimum wage or not paid for the overtime they put in, while others are not paid at all. Due to resource constraints the Attorney General's office is only able to help a small fraction of these workers. Many of the victims are owed sums of money that are not large enough to interest a private attorney in the case, even if they could afford one, but at the same time are substantial enough to make a meaningful difference in the life of a low-wage worker. Traditional civil litigation often results in a months- or even years-long process before a worker receives a judgment, and actually collecting the wages can take even longer.

In response to each of the above challenges, GBLS advocates, in tandem with legal partners at Justice at Work, established "Wage Courts" in the small claims sessions at Boston Municipal Court and in Chelsea District Court. On

wage court day at each court, advocates are available to help victims of wage theft present their cases and collect their unpaid wages. The Clerks' Office at each court has helped advocates choose and schedule appropriate days for wage court.

GBLS has also tailored its outreach efforts toward finding cases that can be brought in these wage sessions in Boston and Chelsea. GBLS staffs monthly wage clinics with the Attorney General's office, other legal partners including members of the private bar, and workers' centers for workers whose cases could not be handled by the Attorney General's office. In addition, GBLS holds clinics at social services and immigrant rights organizations to locate workers who could benefit from Wage Court.

Since January 2017 GBLS has provided legal assistance to workers in 25 filed or pending small claims cases. So far, GBLS has helped them recover more than \$62,000 for their wage claims.

## Thank You for Your Support, Boston-Area Companies! 2017 Corporate Fund Drive Underway

Every year, over 40 major Boston-area companies and their legal departments show their commitment to civil legal aid through donations to GBLS' Corporate Fund Drive. These gifts help GBLS ensure survival and safety for those in greatest need in our community, including homeless families, people with disabilities, survivors of domestic violence, and elders.

The 2017 drive launched this fall. We are very grateful to our corporate supporters who, through their generous support, recognize GBLS' mission and great work to

promote social justice for all. Thank you also to the Corporate Fund Drive's hard-working committee members who are critical to its success! Chair of the Corporate Fund Drive Committee Louis Goodman, of Skadden, said,



“This effort is part of a long tradition of corporate support for the mission of GBLS. We are grateful for their contributions.” As of press time, generous donors have contributed \$245,400! Your support makes a huge difference for thousands of vulnerable people

whose lives are changed through the legal assistance GBLS provides. Thank you.

## Save the Date: Lobby Day for Civil Legal Aid Funding on February 6, 2018

Every year, GBLS clients, former clients, Client Caucus members of the Board of Directors, community organization representatives, staff, fellows, volunteers, and law students go to the State House to advocate for civil legal aid funding. They meet with their legislators to tell them how GBLS' legal assistance has made a critical difference in their lives or the lives of members of their

community, and urge them to support an increase in civil legal aid funding in the MA state budget. The need remains unabated throughout Massachusetts, not only in GBLS' service area.

The 2018 Client/Staff Lobby Day event will take place February 6, 2018, from 10:00am to noon at the State House, and we hope to have a huge turnout!

## GBLS Receives Funding to Provide Civil Legal Services for Area Crime Victims

GBLS has received a two-year sub-grant totaling more than \$1,281,000 from the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA) to provide civil legal services to crime victims who live in Boston and other cities and towns in the greater Boston area. Victims of crime are often left with significant legal needs beyond those addressed by the criminal justice system. For example, victims of sexual assault may need assistance understanding and advocating for their civil legal rights if the assault occurred in a workplace or on a college campus. Domestic violence survivors may need civil legal assistance with child custody, divorce, or access to stable housing. Other civil legal needs include access to healthcare and other benefits and assistance with issues related to guardianship, debt collection, and immigration.

The funding will increase access to these services for victims of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse—as well as to victims of non-violent crimes like fraud, financial abuse, or theft. Referrals are also made to other social service providers to meet each client's individual and

long-term safety needs. The grant will be administered by the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI). To learn more, please visit <https://massclavc.org>, call 617-371-1234, or visit [www.gbls.org](http://www.gbls.org).

“We are appreciative of the opportunity to provide critical legal assistance to victims of crime,” said GBLS Executive Director Jacquelynne Bowman. “We know that many victims or survivors of crime face significant barriers attempting to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of a crime. Funding from MOVA enables us to help remove some of those barriers and solidify a path to safety.”

A domestic violence survivor whom GBLS assisted in court to protect her twin girls from their abusive father stated, “I write to show my deep gratitude for...GBLS. I have finally found my voice and you will hear me roar. This is the beginning of what I feel is an obligation to speak out and to speak up for the other women and children who are afraid or do not know where to go for help.”



## Grandmother Receives Help to Find Sanctuary & Stability

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him with three counts of kidnapping.

Huong was referred to GBLS through an attorney at a partner organization, the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence (ATASK). Huong asked for help with a divorce and a Violence against Women Act (VAWA) petition that allows battered immigrants to petition for legal status in the U.S. without relying on an abusive U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident

spouse to sponsor their application. Her GBLS attorney agreed to help her with the VAWA petition and worked with her extensively to get the required documents, while the ATASK attorney took the divorce case (that GBLS could not take due to Huong living outside of our service area). The two attorneys coordinated efforts, sharing documents for their respective cases.

One of the critical services Huong's GBLS attorney provided was to prepare her to testify against her abuser at the

criminal hearing. Tung was found guilty of the charges and was sentenced to 18 months in the House of Corrections and two years of probation. The attorney then gathered documentation from the criminal case to submit to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services as proof of abuse for the VAWA petition. After two long years, the VAWA petition was approved and Huong was granted a green card. She may now remain lawfully in the U.S. and get support from her network to heal from the trauma she endured.

**Ensure fairness for all in the justice system.  
Please go to [www.gbls.org](http://www.gbls.org) and donate today!**