

HEALTH LAW ADVOCATES

STAFF ATTORNEY

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY PROGRAM FOR KIDS

Eastern Massachusetts

HEALTH LAW ADVOCATES

Health Law Advocates (HLA) is a dynamic non-profit, public interest law firm whose mission is to provide pro bono legal services to Massachusetts residents with low income and who have difficulty accessing or paying for health care. Founded in 1996, HLA provides individual representation and advice for more than 1,200 clients annually. HLA also engages in system-wide litigation, public policy advocacy, and educational programming to advance its goals. Learn more about HLA at <https://www.healthlawadvocates.org/>

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY PROGRAM FOR KIDS

HLA's Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids (MHAP for Kids) diverts children with unmet mental health needs from the juvenile justice system by helping them access mental health services. MHAP for Kids attorneys are embedded in Family Resource Centers (FRCs) where they help at-risk youth overcome barriers to mental health services. A Boston University study of MHAP for Kids found that the program significantly improves the lives and health of children and their families. Since Fiscal Year 2018, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has provided major funding to significantly expand and sustain MHAP for Kids.

What services does MHAP for Kids provide?

- Begins or improves special education services
- Secures and/or coordinates community-based mental health services
- Collaborates with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Youth Services (DYS), and Department of Developmental Services (DDS)
- Advocates for general education accommodations
- Assists with health insurance coverage.

Proven Results

Boston University's School of Public Health (BUSPH) conducted a two-year study, from 2015-2017, on the efficacy of MHAP for Kids. Some key highlights include:

- Improved school attendance
- Decreased use of emergency mental health services by children
- Decreased inpatient hospitalizations of children
- Decreased children's stays in residential facilities
- Decreased children's stays in emergency shelters
- Significant improvement in overall mental health of children
- Significant reduction in parental rates of depression
- Significant decrease in parental stress

BUSPH continued to assess the program after the initial 2017 report and provided follow-up data that examined the impact of COVID-19 and the ongoing ability of MHAP for Kids to serve children in the program. The ongoing study found that the initiative:

- Significantly improves the overall mental health of children
- Significantly improves the overall mental health of family caregivers
- Dramatically decreases the need for inpatient hospitalizations of children (34% reduced to 14%)
- Significantly decreases the need for emergency room visits (42% reduced to 17%)
- Significantly decreases the need for in-home mobile crisis team services (40% reduced to 24%)
- Reduces juvenile delinquency court involvement
- Decreases Children Requiring Assistance petitions
- Significantly improves overall family functioning.

MHAP for Kids – COVID-19 Response

The pandemic exacerbated the challenges that confronted children served by MHAP for Kids. The data points below provide a profile of children in the program during the period when the Commonwealth of Massachusetts declared a state of emergency:

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

MHAP FOR KIDS STAFF ATTORNEY POSITION

Health Law Advocates (HLA) seeks a highly qualified, motivated lawyer with knowledge of the juvenile court, mental health, and/or education systems to join the talented MHAP for Kids team as Staff Attorney to cover counties in Eastern Massachusetts. The attorney, like attorneys serving in HLA MHAP for Kids offices in counties across the state, will advocate for children in school, court, and mental health systems to ensure that their mental health needs are met, and their legal rights are protected. The Staff Attorney will advocate for up to 30 youth at a time.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Meet with clients
- Conduct legal research and writing
- Analyze education, medical, court, and other relevant records
- Develop and maintain strong working relationships with staff of the host Family Resource Centers
- Develop and maintain strong working relationships with state agencies, such as DCF, DMH, DYS, and DDS as well as other stakeholders in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems
- Manage case files
- Promote MHAP for Kids in the community
- Participate in program evaluation.

QUALIFICATIONS

All HLA employees are expected to have the skills to:

- Work both independently and as an effective team member
- Collaborate with and support staff at all levels of the organization
- Communicate clearly and professionally
- Demonstrate empathy and sensitivity while working directly with clients encountering crises
- Maintain confidentiality and, for attorneys, strict adherence to all professional responsibility requirements for the practice of law
- Demonstrate intellectual curiosity, openness, and the desire and ability to listen and learn
- Understand and believe in the mission of the organization
- Embody the values of the organization, including a commitment to decreasing inequity in our health care system and society as a whole.

Minimum Requirements Include:

- Juris Doctor Degree
- 4+ years of relevant work experience
- Excellent communication skills, including oral advocacy and writing skills
- A strong understanding of the juvenile court
- A strong understanding of children's mental health systems
- Strong advocacy skills.

Other Preferred Qualifications:

- Track record of effectively collaborating with government and community-based service agencies
- Demonstrated cultural competence
- Proven ability to handle a substantial caseload
- Knowledge of the communities served by the Family Resource Centers in Eastern Massachusetts
- Bilingual skills (English and Spanish, Portuguese, and/or Haitian Creole).

BENEFITS

This position includes a robust benefits package including a competitive salary (\$74,000-\$85,000, based on experience and other qualifications), comprehensive health insurance, and a generous paid leave policy.

TO APPLY

HLA has retained John Solmonese of Solmonese Search Partners, Inc., to lead the search. Interested candidates should send their resume and cover letter to Solmonese (at jsolmonese@gmail.com) and apply online at <https://hlainc.efficientapply.com/jobs/> Applicants will be accepted on a rolling basis until the position is filled.

HLA is committed to diversity in its workforce. A crucial part of HLA's vision is supporting cultural and linguistic competence, as well as ensuring diversity of staff and volunteers, so clients can be best served. Women, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, people of color, and people who speak English as a second language are encouraged to apply.