



MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN

Celebrating 40 years of . . . Changing conditions for many . . . Helping one at a time.

2009 Highlights for Massachusetts Advocates for Children

- Authored an explosive report, ***Targeted, Taunted, Tormented: Bullying of Children with Autism***, based on the results of an online survey responded to by nearly 400 parents from all across the state, supporting one of MAC's legislative priorities this year: H. 3804 – An Act to Address the Bullying of Children with Autism.
- Led the advocacy for six other bills related to **special education**, that include requiring teacher training in augmentative and alternative communication to enable non-verbal children with disabilities to participate in class and amending attorneys' fees provisions in special education law to ensure that all families, regardless of income, have an opportunity to exercise essential due process rights.
- Undertook a key role at the statewide policy level promoting improved linkages between **mental health and schools**, through both the newly created Schools and Behavioral Health Task Force and the Community Behavioral Health Initiative (implementation of the "Rosie D." court order)
- Successfully advocated together with community partners and parents to address school assignment and transportation, special education and English-language learning issues in the **Boston Public Schools**, including the creation of an ELL Task Force by the School Committee to develop major policy recommendations for these underserved students.
- Maintained **state budget line items** for MAC priority programs: the Children Autism Medicaid Waiver, Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Program, and Safe and Supportive Learning Environment grant program (i.e., trauma-sensitive schools).
- Held a major **Summit on Trauma and Learning** at Lesley University in collaboration with Lesley's Center on Special Education. Lesley followed up the Summit by launching its first course this fall on Trauma and Learning which uses MAC's publication, *Helping Traumatized Children Learn* as a text.
- Assumed a leadership role in a coalition of the **Education Law Task Force** to advocate for and testify on a bill that would reduce the impact of overly harsh school discipline policies.
- Joined in a new and exciting partnership with the **DLA Piper law firm**, which is providing extensive pro bono assistance in special education related to Boston, autism and statewide areas of concern.
- Received extensive **media visibility** locally at the Boston Globe, Boston Herald, WBUR, Baystate Banner, and regional newspapers, as well as national coverage in the US News and World Report, Good Morning America, Washington Post.com, ABC.com, and Education Week.
- Worked with the **parent group in Somerville** to support implementation of the school district's goal to increase inclusion opportunities.
- Responded to 816 parents and others through our Children's Law Support Project **Helpline**, providing advice, referrals, technical assistance, and in some cases, full representation.

--See other side for what people are saying about MAC--

These testimonials are mainly taken from the 40th Anniversary Celebration Program Book, which also contains an extensive history of MAC and its present initiatives. It can be downloaded at MAC's website—www.massadvocates.org

Child advocacy is a vital tool to help us craft good laws and then to make sure the laws are implemented; nobody does that for kids better than MAC.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy

This past year we were faced with a very serious educational situation requiring the skills of a highly trained legal professional. I truly began to think we had finally reached a point in time where I would not be able to insure my son received the support he desperately needed... The answer came unexpectedly during a phone call to Mass Advocates for Children... Without your help, I'm not sure my family would have survived this crisis. Not only did you commit to helping my family resolve this issue, you replaced hopelessness with empowerment. Thanks to your efforts, my son is once again in an educational setting with the support and structure required to meet his needs. He is focused on the future and looking forward to a successful life. ...

Christine M. Kelly, parent

Since its early incarnation as the Task Force on Children Out of Schools, through its tireless and dedicated work over these past 40 years, MAC has been a powerful and indispensable force, helping to preserve, and even in some cases to expand, the rights of students with disabilities in public schools and the quality of their programs.

Robert Crabtree, Special Education Attorney and co-drafter of the first special education law.

As a funder, we wanted to make an impact in the short term to help families with autism in the here and now. After our due diligence, the organization that kept popping up on our radar screen over and over again was the Massachusetts Advocates for Children. The program they came up with impressed us for a number of reasons. First, they really knew what they were doing. Second, they had a reputation for not only being extraordinarily skilled and tenacious, but also for operating with the highest integrity...But the thing that most impressed us was the extraordinary enthusiasm they brought to their work. They were willing to walk through walls to get the job done...and that was a very compelling reason for our foundation to get involved with their work.

Ken Farber, the Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation

MAC has provided my school with a visionary framework for assisting traumatized children.

They have been great in very difficult cases. They take a strong position without being needlessly antagonistic—a strategy that works best with schools.

...Each individual associated with MAC is highly professional, passionate, and responsive in all their interactions with families, other professionals in the community, and to the children they serve. ...As a professional I have benefited tremendously from their resources.

Representative responses from legal services attorneys and community collaborators from a 2008 survey assessing MAC's effectiveness, conducted by Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation.

When our small band of founders started this journey, I could not have imagined this day, celebrating 40 years of extraordinary advocacy on behalf of children in this Commonwealth.

Hubie Jones