



## **NEWS: For Immediate Release**

### **DLA Piper Launches Signature Pro Bono Project in Massachusetts to Improve Special Education Programs for Low-Income Families**

#### **Firm Pledges 1000 Hours During First Year of Program**

**(Boston) June 2, 2009** – DLA Piper announced today the launch of its Boston Pro Bono Signature Project, named the Education Rights Project, an ambitious undertaking to address the needs of low-income special education children in Massachusetts. DLA Piper is collaborating on the initiative with Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC), a private, nonprofit legal advocacy organization that functions as an independent and effective voice for children who face significant barriers to equal education and life opportunities. Boston civic leader and MAC board member emeritus Hubie Jones was a featured speaker at the launch ceremony on May 28.

“Too many children in the Commonwealth are not receiving educational services to which they are legally entitled,” said Dan Rosenfeld, a partner in DLA Piper’s Litigation practice group and Signature Project leader. “Our hope is that through this initiative, and using a broad range of strategies, we will be able to help assure that the needs of those children are met.”

“Through this partnership and the major commitment of resources by DLA Piper, MAC will be able to provide more case advocacy to its clients and expand our capacity to do systemic advocacy,” said Jerry Mogul, Executive Director for MAC. “We are pleased to be chosen by DLA Piper for its signature project and are excited about the prospect of working together to change the lives of many children and families”

The project is organized into four components made up of teams from DLA Piper and MAC: (1) advocacy to support children with autism spectrum disorder; (2) advocacy for students in the Boston Public School system; (3) advocacy around statewide special education issues, especially for young adults with disabilities transitioning out of high school and for issues related to the state’s education department; and (4) a synergy team involving national healthcare, insurance and financial corporate partners.

The Education Rights Project grew from MAC’s relationship with several DLA Piper attorneys who have been providing pro bono special education advocacy services to MAC clients for the past two years. In addition to dramatically expanding this existing case advocacy commitment, the Signature Project will create a strategic partnership by joining DLA Piper attorneys with MAC’s in advocacy strategies designed to promote systemic change.

#### **An Ambitious Signature Project Platform**

The Boston office of DLA Piper will donate a base of 1000 attorney hours to the Education Rights Project in its first year. More importantly, the development of this Signature Project has attracted significant interest and enthusiasm from the office’s attorneys.

“We fully expect that all of our attorneys will donate hours to the project in addition to a broad range of staff members who have expressed an interest in participating,” said Rosenfeld. “And beyond DLA Piper, the collective and coordinated expertise of its partners should add to the successes we hope to achieve through this ambitious initiative.”

In other successful DLA Piper Signature Projects, the firm developed strategic partnerships with nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, foundations and corporate clients. These partnerships aggregate and focus the firm's legal expertise to develop innovative solutions to challenging social problems and provide world class legal services to the most vulnerable and underserved members of the global community. For example, lawyers from the firm's national Real Estate group spent over 5,000 hours in 2008 helping victims of Hurricane Katrina to overcome legal barriers to rebuild their homes. In New York, lawyers spent more than 3,600 hours last year working to improve the educational outcomes of low-income children in New York City. Other Signature projects have focused on issues like hunger, domestic violence and access to justice and legal representation.

Overall, the firm's total 2009 pro bono commitment in the U.S. will exceed 150,000 attorney hours.

#### **About DLA Piper's Education Rights Project Partner:**

Massachusetts Advocates for Children ([www.massadvocates.org](http://www.massadvocates.org)) is a private, non-profit organization which has been a premier child advocacy leader in the state since 1969.

Founded by Hubie Jones as the Task Force on Children Out of School, MAC's first investigative report in 1970 on the exclusion of children from public schools in Boston led to the 1972 enactment of Chapter 766, Massachusetts' ground-breaking law guaranteeing education for children with disabilities. It also led to the Bilingual Education Act, the first such law in the nation.

During the next two decades, MAC's legislative and administrative advocacy led to reforms in child mental health, vocational education, lead poisoning prevention, student retention policies and child nutrition. MAC sued successfully to force the Boston Public Schools to live up to its special education obligations.

In 1992, MAC became part of the network of civil legal aid agencies in Massachusetts, and through that network, began the Children's Law Support Project, identifying emerging children's needs and providing back-up legal support to legal service agencies around the state. During the 1990s, MAC added community outreach and coalition-building components to work with parent and community organizations for educational equity in Boston and to protect Chapter 766 statewide.

MAC employs an array of strategies to change conditions for many, while also helping one child at a time. For example, through its Autism Special Education Legal Support Center, MAC trains parents, educators and medical professionals throughout the state on special education rights; provides legal advice, technical assistance and/or case representation to parents for their children with autism spectrum disorder; works intensively with Haitian and Latino parents in selected communities to help them overcome significant cultural and linguistic barriers; led the effort to help establish and fund the state's Children's Autism Medicaid Waiver program; and provided key leadership to help in the passage of the Autism IEP Act, a new law which requires special education teams to consider and address the full range of a child's complex needs resulting from autism spectrum disorder in order to ensure provision of state-of-the-art supports and services.

#### **About DLA Piper ([www.dlapiper.com](http://www.dlapiper.com))**

DLA Piper has 3,700 lawyers in 28 countries and 66 offices throughout the U.S., U.K., Continental Europe, Middle East and Asia. In certain jurisdictions, this information may be considered attorney advertising.

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