



# MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN

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## From the Director

As the fall season signals the return to school, children across the Commonwealth are starting anew, with fresh hopes for a successful year. But with budget cuts and changes in a number of laws and regulations, this will be a challenging year for some of our more vulnerable children and families. MAC is there, as it has been for over 30 years, to help smooth the path for those children who face roadblocks and to keep them from being left behind.

MAC has worked hard this year to fulfill its vital advocacy mission of changing conditions for many while also helping one child at a time. I'd like to inaugurate our newsletter by sharing with you highlights of our work and news from our office.

While we are mailing out this first newsletter, the most efficient way to communicate regularly is through e-mail. If you are interested in receiving regular updates, I would appreciate very much your sending me your e-mail address by contacting me at [jmogul@massadvocates.org](mailto:jmogul@massadvocates.org), or calling me at 617-357-8431, x231. Your e-mail address would only be used to communicate with MAC and not shared with any other organization. Thank you so much for your support and interest in MAC.

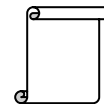
*Jerry Mogul*  
Executive Director

## RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Since late last spring, MAC has been in the forefront of the legislative battle to enable ***students with disabilities*** to have a fair chance to submit an appeal in order to pass the ***MCAS*** exam and receive their high school degree. Julia Landau, senior staff attorney, testified at length on September 9 at a public hearing of the Legislature's Committee on Education, Arts and Humanities. She also provided key advocacy support leading to a unanimous vote by the Education Committee on a new bill that we hope will soon be sent to the governor for his signature.
- During the last school year, MAC and the Latino Education Action Network it organized worked with the Boston Public Schools to assure that under the ***new English immersion law***, parents of children over the age of 10 entitled to a waiver would receive this option immediately instead of waiting for the new school year. As a result of our advocacy, over 400 students received timely waivers so they could continue to receive bi-lingual education instead of being placed in an untested immersion program.
- In October, MAC is conducting an in-depth 12-hour training through Boston Parents Organizing Network for Boston parents to learn how to assist other parents advocate for children on issues related to special education. So far in 2003, we have provided ***education and training*** to well over 1,000 parents, educators and health professionals in a wide variety of topics, such as autism, discipline, MCAS, trauma and learning, and changes in the special education law.



**SAVE THE DATE:**  
*for a very special evening*  
**Friday, April 30, 2004, 6:00-10:00 PM**  
**"A Tribute to Hubie Jones"**



## MAC'S MISSION

*To improve the educational and life opportunities of children throughout the Commonwealth, especially those who are vulnerable because of race, poverty, limited English, or disability. We work to assure that all of these children will have full access to the services and resources -- particularly in the areas of public education, health and welfare, and legal representation -- to which they are entitled and which will enable them to reach their fullest potential.*

## FROM THE OFFICE

### Staff Update

Thanks to the generosity of the Gordon Fellowship, funded through the Mass. Legal Assistance Corp., MAC has been able to hire a new staff attorney, **Nilda Rodriguez**. She began her two-year fellowship on September 3. The Gordon Fellowship was established to help provide civil legal services to low-income communities which have had difficulty accessing the justice system due to linguistic, racial or cultural barriers.

### Funding Update

Just over the past few months, MAC has received funding commitments from the following: Boston Foundation and Hyams Foundation for the Boston School Reform Project; Nancy Lurie Marks Foundation for the Autism Special Education Legal Support Center; Mass. Legal Assistance Corp., Boston Bar Foundation and the Mass. Bar Foundation for the Children's Law Support Project and the "train the trainer" project; the Mass. Developmental Disabilities Council for MCAS Disability Transition; and the Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation for the Trauma and Learning Policy Center.

Thank you to these and other MAC funders for your continued support and confidence in the important work that we do..

This year, for the first time, MAC has been chosen to appear in the *Catalogue for Philanthropy*, to be distributed to high-income households in Massachusetts in time for the holiday giving season.

## FROM THE FIELD

### Case Study

MAC provides advice, referral, or representation to parents who call our hotline with concerns around school issues related to special education, expulsions, suspensions, etc. Here is just one recent example of how MAC makes a difference in the lives of children excluded from equal educational opportunity.

*Jonathan was diagnosed with autism at the age of four. His parents came to MAC frustrated with the school system. Jonathan was out of school. There was no home program. There was no summer program. The teacher that was teaching his class had never had any special education training. The parents were unable to work because they had to take care of him. Jonathan was showing substantial regression in all areas of his life; he was headed towards a residential program at a very young age.*

*Then MAC went to work. We filed for an emergency hearing to get summer services and then secured an outside consultant in Applied Behavior Analysis to come into the home to evaluate Jonathan. We eventually went back into a hearing and put together a program in his school which consisted of the outside consultant coming into the home and school and taking the lead on designing an individual program for Jonathan. A special education teacher was trained in the field of Autism.*

*Now, at age 8, Jonathan is making progress. He remains with his family with a home program and his parents are able to work. He is in his local school with a state-of-the-art full-year program. Our advocacy had another impact, too: the three other children with autism who were also floundering in the original school program are now also benefiting.*

## In Memoriam

Charlie Cabot, a board member for MAC for over 30 years, recently passed away. He was a staunch advocate for children, particularly around high quality education and charter schools. We will miss him deeply.

## MAC IN THE NEWS

*On August 4, MAC's Somerville project and its funders, Beverly and Miriam Schwartz, were featured in an eight-minute segment on WBUR's morning news. The report spoke of this project as a model for making substantive changes in special education that could be applied to other cities and nationally.*

*Susan Cole, MAC senior attorney, authored an article in the Mass. Bar Association Section Review on the school expulsion crisis. The article discussed legislation MAC helped to draft that obtained MBA approval to provide lobbying support in the next legislative session.*