

# Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services

432 Columbia Street • Suite 16 • Cambridge, Massachusetts 02141 • Tel (617) 494-1800 • TDD 494-1757 • Fax 494-8222

March 23, 1998

Honorable Mayor Frances Duehay  
Honorable Vice Mayor Anthony D. Galluccio  
Members of the City Council  
Cambridge City Hall  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

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CAMBRIDGE, MA

Dear Mayor Duehay, Vice Mayor Galluccio and Members of the City Council:

We write to ask that you vote to allocate \$50,000 in municipal funds to allow Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services to continue a critical program that offers legal help to Cambridge tenants who are elders, people with disabilities and low income families. All but one of us are residents of Cambridge. Some of us are client or professional members of the CASLS Advisory Board, one of whom maintains a law practice in the City. Some of us are members of the Board of Directors of CASLS' parent organization, Greater Boston Legal Services. Some of us are tenants who have been helped by CASLS in the last year. We are all concerned that low income Cambridge renters remain at risk because of continued changes in the City's rental market.

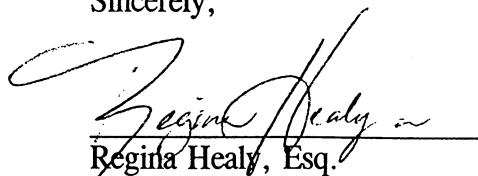
Last year at this time, you voted to recommend allocation of \$50,000 to CASLS as part of the City's New Lease program to assist tenants in formerly rent controlled apartments. You recognized the need to promote and preserve affordable housing, and the importance of protecting elders, people with disabilities and low income renters from eviction and homelessness. Your vote, and the other actions you took, were sensible and measured responses to the needs of Cambridge tenants. We thank you for your support. It was essential to the work of CASLS over last ten months. However, as the enclosed report from CASLS indicates, Cambridge tenants continue to be threatened by rent increases and evictions, unsafe housing conditions, condominium conversion, subsidy discrimination, and the expiration of federal affordable use restrictions in multi-family housing. This year, as last year, renters need to know their legal rights to guard against displacement and homelessness.

CASLS' work for Cambridge renters has been a tremendous success. So far, not one family helped by the program has been rendered homeless. CASLS is still recovering from severe staff reductions and funding losses in 1995 and 1996. Their work for the City's tenants cannot continue without your support. We thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

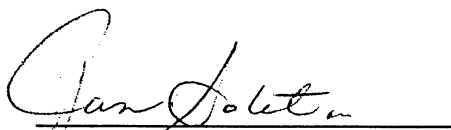


Elaine Cheevers  
18 Allen Street, Apt. 2  
Cambridge, MA

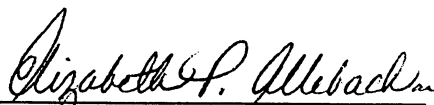


Regina Healy, Esq.  
Healy, Fiske & Woodbury  
189 Cambridge Street  
Cambridge, MA 02141

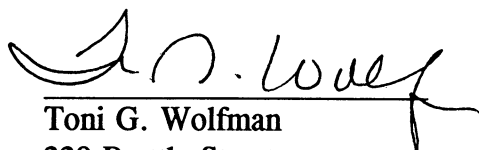




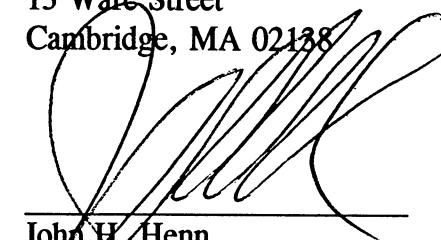
Jan Solet  
86 Otis Street  
Cambridge, MA 02141



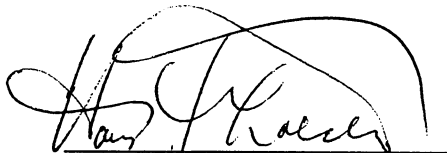
Elizabeth P. Allebach  
13 Ware Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138



Toni G. Wolfman  
229 Brattle Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138



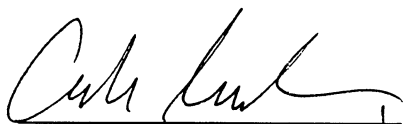
John H. Henn  
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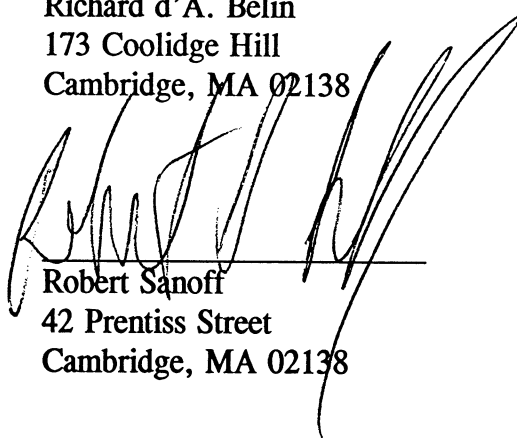
Hans F. Loeser  
1010 Memorial Drive  
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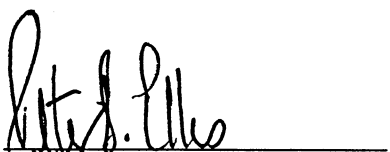
Richard d'A. Belin  
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Adam Sonnenschein  
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Cambridge, MA 02138



Robert Sanoff  
42 Prentiss Street  
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Peter B. Ellis  
16 Highland Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138



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Cambridge, MA 02140

# Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services

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## NEW LEASE PARTNERSHIP

## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE AND CAMBRIDGE AND SOMERVILLE LEGAL SERVICES

## CASLS 1997 YEAR END REPORT

### I. Introduction

On May 12, 1997, the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) and Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS) entered into a partnership with the City of Cambridge's New Lease program to provide legal services to low income families, elders and people with disabilities affected by the end of rent control. The partnership enabled CASLS to increase its staff capacity to assist families faced with rent increases and eviction. The project was designed to maximize services to affected families by providing training and technical assistance to New Lease staff, whose role included intake, advice, brief service and case management, and by focusing CASLS efforts on direct representation. This report details CASLS activities under the partnership through December 31, 1997. It also discusses the need for continued advocacy after the May 1998 end of the project.

### II. Partnership Activities and Accomplishments

**A. Training and Technical Assistance.** At the beginning of the partnership, CASLS staff provided two in-depth trainings to the City's New Lease staff to help in the identification of a range of legal issues, including eviction defense, and eligibility for public and subsidized housing. In addition, CASLS developed comprehensive desk reference guides for New Lease case managers. Throughout the partnership, CASLS advocates maintained daily contact with City staff, providing technical assistance on individual New Lease-related cases. The relationship created an efficient system for supporting participants in the New Lease program, enabling New Lease staff to provide advice and case management, and freeing CASLS advocates to concentrate on direct representation.

**B. Direct Representation.** Under the partnership, CASLS and New Lease staff created a special intake and referral system to expedite and prioritize the provision of legal services to participating families. The intake system involved initial screening by New Lease staff, with referral of appropriate legal disputes to CASLS via facsimile transmission (FAX). CASLS also provided representation to New Lease-eligible households that directly contacted the law office. Through December 31, 1997, CASLS staff provided direct representation in 56 separate cases, including 7 matters involving elderly families, and 14 families with children. Altogether, the project has so far served 104 individuals, including households with 30 children.

**C. Maintaining Affordability.** Where appropriate, CASLS works with groups of tenants to help them maintain the continued affordability of formerly rent controlled housing. Examples of these cases include:

- CASLS represented four households in a six unit property. The building was in poor condition. The owner commenced eviction cases against all tenants. The legal proceedings became complicated by questions about the form of ownership in the building, a pending foreclosure and the owner's bankruptcy. CASLS staff successfully stopped the eviction cases, and worked with the tenants to facilitate a sale of the property to Homeowner's Rehabilitation, Inc. at foreclosure. Two families have since purchased homes in Cambridge through the City's affordable home ownership program. The two other households moved to affordable, non-profit rental units in Cambridge. The six units in the building will be renovated by HRI for affordable use.

- In a second case, CASLS represented a group of eight low-income families and elder households in two properties purchased for speculation at the end of rent control. One property, a multi-story building, was in extremely poor condition, with exposed wiring, missing porches and exterior staircases and other violations of health and safety standards. The new owner moved to evict the tenants. CASLS filed a District Court receivership case for the tenants, leading to immediate repairs of the most dangerous conditions and a nine month moratorium on evictions. Eventually one property was purchased by another owner. The new landlord has promised to maintain rents at levels below current market rents. Negotiations for long-term affordability continue.

### III. The Need for Continued Advocacy

Although rent control for low income people, elders and people with disabilities ended in December 1996, the impact on the rental market continues. In calendar year 1997, CASLS served 750 Cambridge households in a variety of legal problems. Nearly 200 of those cases involved housing matters, evidence of a continuing demand for legal help. In addition, the Eviction Free Zone and the Campaign to Save 2000 Homes collects information on the City's affordable housing crisis. Available data indicates that the need for continued advocacy falls into several areas of concern:

**1. Rent Increases and Evictions.** The recently completed *Cambridge Rental Housing Study*<sup>1</sup> indicates that since 1994, rents increased 54% in formerly rent controlled units. The study also reports median monthly rents for all bedroom sizes of \$900 in market rate units and

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<sup>1</sup>See, *Cambridge Rental Housing Study: Impacts of the Termination of Rent Control on Population, Housing Costs, and Housing Stock* (Atlantic Marketing Research, January 21, 1998).

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A communication was received from Elaine Cheevers and Regina Healy, Esq., Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, transmitting a request that the City Council vote to allocate \$50,000 in municipal funds to allow Cambridge Somerville Legal Service to continue a critical program that offers legal help to Cambridge tenants who are elderly people people with disabilities and low income families.

In City Council March 30, 1998

Referred to

City Manager