



## **Virtual Community Mediation Briefing for Legislators**



Thursday, January 27, 2022

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom Meeting

***\*Attendees are asked to sign-in through the chat upon joining the meeting***

### **Agenda**

#### **WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS**

Senator Adam Hinds and Representative Paul Tucker  
Susan Jeghelian, MA Office of Public Collaboration

#### **PRESENTATIONS**

#### **Celebrating 10 years of State-Sponsored Community Mediation:**

##### **Grant Program Achievements and Looking Forward**

Susan Jeghelian and Rosalind Cresswell, MA Office of Public Collaboration

##### **Center Reflections on Impact of the Grant Program**

Brad Gordon, Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, Pittsfield

Sara Barnes, Martha's Vineyard Mediation Program

Gail Packer, Community Dispute Settlement Center, Cambridge

Seth Izen, Metrowest Mediation Services, Framingham

Gloria Santa Anna, Collaborative Resolutions Group, Greenfield

##### **Community Mediation Grant Program Budget Request**

Susan Jeghelian, MA Office of Public Collaboration

### **WRAP UP**

## **State-Funded Community Mediation Centers**

**Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority Mediation Program, Pittsfield**  
*serving Berkshire County*

**Cape Mediation, Orleans**  
*serving Barnstable and Nantucket Counties*

**Collaborative Resolutions Group, Greenfield**  
*serving Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire Counties*

**Community Dispute Settlement Center, Cambridge**  
*serving Middlesex, Norfolk, Suffolk Counties*

**Family Services of Central Massachusetts Mediation Program, Worcester**  
*serving Worcester County*

**Greater Brockton Center for Dispute Resolution, Brockton**  
*serving Plymouth, Bristol Counties*

**Martha's Vineyard Mediation Program, Inc., Vineyard Haven**  
*serving Dukes County*

**Mediation Services of North Central MA, Inc., Fitchburg**  
*serving Worcester County*

**Metropolitan Mediation Services, Brookline**  
*serving Suffolk, Middlesex, Norfolk counties*

**Metro West Mediation Services, Framingham**  
*serving Middlesex County*

**Middlesex Community College Law Center, Lowell**  
*serving Middlesex, Essex, Suffolk Counties*

**North Shore Community Mediation, Beverly**  
*serving Essex County*

**Community Mediation Center (CMC) Grant Program***“Critical statewide infrastructure and proven cost-effective public investment”***FY 2023 State Budget Request & Justification****Budget Request & Breakdown:****\$2,713,465 for CMC Grant Program Operations (line item 7100-0700)***80% grants to qualified community mediation centers; 20% MOPC program administration expenses*

Center Grant Program (\$1,063,465) to cover core staff to coordinate volunteers, conduct outreach and education, and do fundraising to enhance accessibility of services and sustainability of centers; cloud case management database system for tracking and reporting on activities and impacts for commonwealth

Youth CR & RP Program (\$400,000) to fund continuation of conflict resolution and restorative practices projects with local partners under statewide program framework leveraging additional public/private investment

Reentry Mediation Program (\$300,000) to fund continuation of prisoner reentry mediation services at state and county facilities with MA Dept of Correction and County Sheriffs and other partners to reduce rate of recidivism

Housing Mediation Program (\$950,000) to fund continuation of housing mediation services for matters referred by housing education/resource agencies, legal aid organizations and local courts as tool for eviction diversion to prevent homelessness and mitigate the harmful economic impacts of Covid-19

**Economic Impact:**

Total return on the state’s investment of \$2.7 Million in the CMC Grant Program: **\$14 Million ROI<sup>1</sup>**

**\$10.1 million in cost-savings** to citizens and public institutions in avoided and resolved conflicts:

- \$4,791,600 saved in shelter costs from 88 avoided homeless shelter uses
- \$1,912,000 in additional cost savings from 400 mediated cases recovering lost rent etc.
- \$1,547,296 recovered by consumers from consumer mediations
- 858,600 saved from avoided attorney and filing fees from 954 cases mediated
- \$374,500 to the court system/state from 749 successful mediations avoiding trial
- \$280,000 saved overall from 2038 community mediation hours vs private mediation hours
- \$140,000 saved to parties from not using private mediators in 28 divorce mediations
- \$84,000 saved to parties from 14 complex multi-party disputes
- \$40,000 saved to local businesses/organizations from 5 workplace mediations
- \$24,570 saved to parties from avoided legal fees in 91 family mediations
- 17,640 saved from 20 juvenile cases referred by juvenile court
- \$3,972 saved to schools from avoided suspensions/expulsions in 12 peer mediations

**\$3.9 million in leveraged resources** including other funding and in-kind contributions of volunteers:

- \$2,127,556 in additional government and foundation funds raised by centers beyond state operational grants
- \$859,466 of mediation and conflict resolution trainings and workshops for 4180 community members
- \$483,960 leveraged by 758 volunteer mediators at 12 community mediation centers
- \$414,000 from re-investing in centers with established networks of volunteers, referral sources, funders
- \$46,060 from 2399 hours of pro bono administrative services from volunteer, board members and interns

**Social Impact:**

**Helped public agencies to address critical social problems**, including destructive public conflict, youth violence, school bullying, family instability, homelessness, and unfair business practices; and

**Increased access to affordable mediation services** particularly to underserved populations, diversified mediator pools to better reflecting communities served, attracted new funding sources, developed new programs to meet local needs, and promoted mediator excellence.

<sup>1</sup> Documented cost-benefit from MA state-sponsored community mediation: FY13 (\$8,101,833); FY14 (\$7,929,876); FY15 (\$11,844,305); FY16 (\$10,739,386); FY17 (\$12,113,887); FY18 (\$12,110,529); FY19 (\$13,523,144); FY20 (\$12,148,313); **FY21 (\$14,005,220).**

## **Statutory Community Mediation Center Grant Program Framework (G. L. Ch. 75, Section 47)**

- **Performance-based grant program** established as a sustainable funding framework for investment in community mediation to broaden **access to affordable dispute resolution** in the state.
- Awards annual state operational funding to **12 qualified local non-profit mediation centers state-wide**.
- Delivers **“free or low-cost” services** annually to **up to 5000 disputes** through **750 trained volunteers**.
- Serves **primarily low-income citizens** in **14 counties** for conflicts referred by **82 trial court divisions**, as well as schools, families, neighborhoods, businesses, police, housing authorities, and individuals.
- Reaches close to **5,000 people** in education/training annually and **250,000** through public outreach activities.
- Administered by MOPC, the **statutory state office** of dispute resolution at UMass Boston.
- Develops center capacity and programming to meet community needs with frameworks for diverse investment.
- Deploys **unified case management database** system across all grant-funded centers.
- Documents implementation and impact through **monitoring, evaluation** and annual program reporting.

### **MA State-Sponsored Community Mediation Centers**

**Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority - Mediation Center, Pittsfield**  
*-serving Berkshire County*

**Cape Mediation, Orleans**  
*-serving Barnstable & Nantucket Counties*

**Community Dispute Settlement Center, Inc., Cambridge**  
*-serving Middlesex, Norfolk & Suffolk Counties*

**Collaborative Resolutions Group, Greenfield**  
*-serving Franklin, Hampden & Hampshire Counties*

**Family Services of Central Massachusetts – Mediation Program, Worcester**  
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**Greater Brockton Center for Dispute Resolution, Brockton**  
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**Mediation Services of North Central MA, Inc., Fitchburg**  
*-serving Worcester County*

**Metropolitan Mediation Services of Brookline Community Mental Health Center, Inc., Brookline**  
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**Metro West Mediation Services, Inc., Framingham**  
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**Middlesex Community College - Law Center, Lowell**  
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*-serving Essex County*



## Massachusetts Community Mediation Grant Program

### FY 2023 Budget Request – Breakdown

Name	<b>MA Community Mediation Center Grant Program</b>				
Subject	<b>Budget Analysis for Fiscal Year 2023</b>				
Budget line	<b>Operating, Youth, Reentry &amp; Housing Program Grants to Centers</b>	<b>UOM</b>	<b>No. of Units</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Budgeted Amt:</b>
1	Baseline & Performance Grants to Centers (average award) [1][2]	per center	12	\$70,000	\$840,000
2	Youth CR & RP Project Grants to Centers (average award) [3]	per center	12	\$30,000	\$360,000
3	Reentry Mediation Grants to Centers (average award) [4]	per center	12	\$20,000	\$240,000
4	Housing Mediation Grants to Centers (average award) [5]	lump sum	12	\$60,000	\$720,000
5	Education & Training for Center Staff and Center Mediators [6]	lump sum	1	\$10,000	\$10,000
	<b>Subtotal</b>				<b>\$2,170,000</b>
Budget line	<b>Program Management &amp; Evaluation Expenses of MOPC [7]</b>	<b>UOM</b>	<b>No. of Units</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Budgeted Amt:</b>
6	Program Management & Administrative Staff (4 F-T; 3 P-T)	lump sum	1	\$380,000	\$380,000
7	Program Evaluation Staff (2 P-T; 2 graduate research assistants)	lump sum	1	\$130,000	\$130,000
8	Program Administrative, Logistical & Database Expenses	lump sum	1	\$33,465	\$33,465
	<b>Subtotal</b>				<b>\$543,465</b>
9	<b>Total State Funding Requested in Line Item 7100-0700</b>				<b><u>\$2,713,465</u></b>

[1] Baseline operating grants, with a match requirement, for up to 12 existing centers in compliance with eligibility criteria of the 12-Point Model for MA community mediation. Covers center administrative costs, including staff to support outreach and education, intake and screening of referrals, scheduling of mediation, supervision of volunteer mediators and fundraising.

[2] Performance operating grant awards fund a portion of the same type of administrative costs as baseline awards and are based on level of mediation activity, progress on SMART goals, and the extent of collaborations with each other and MOPC.

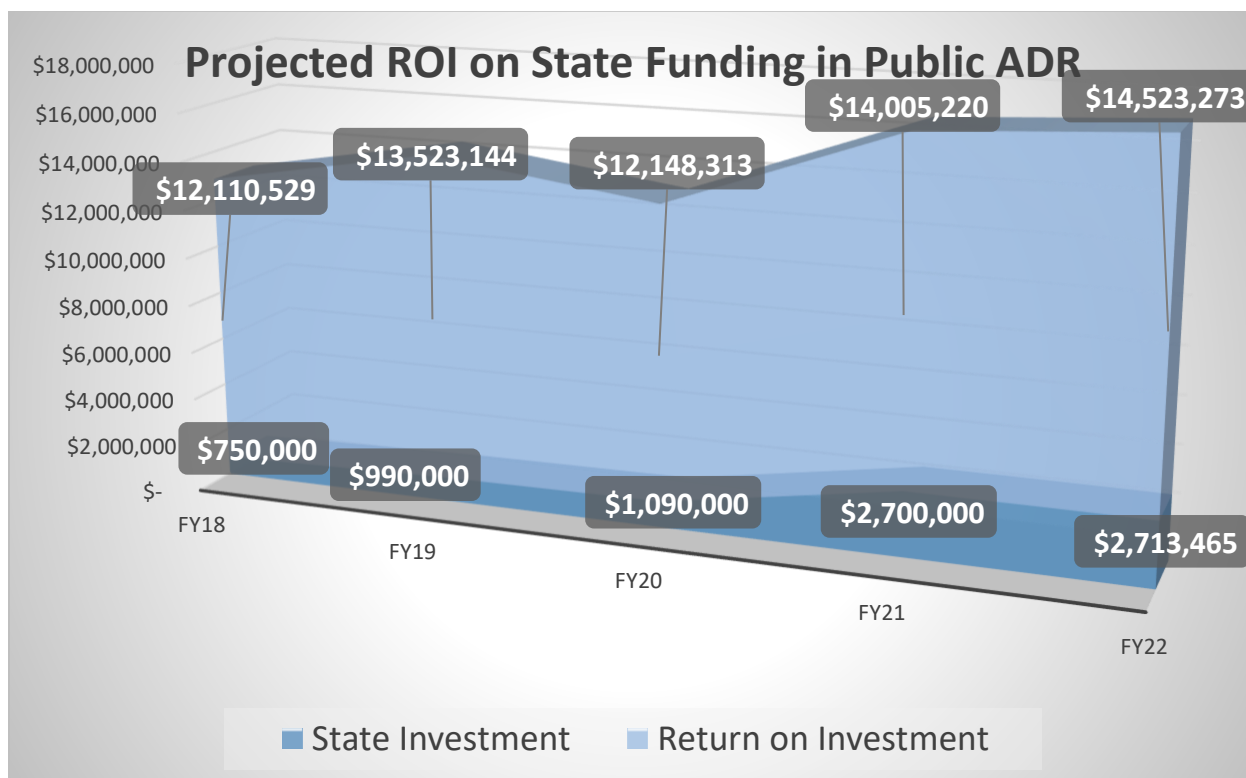
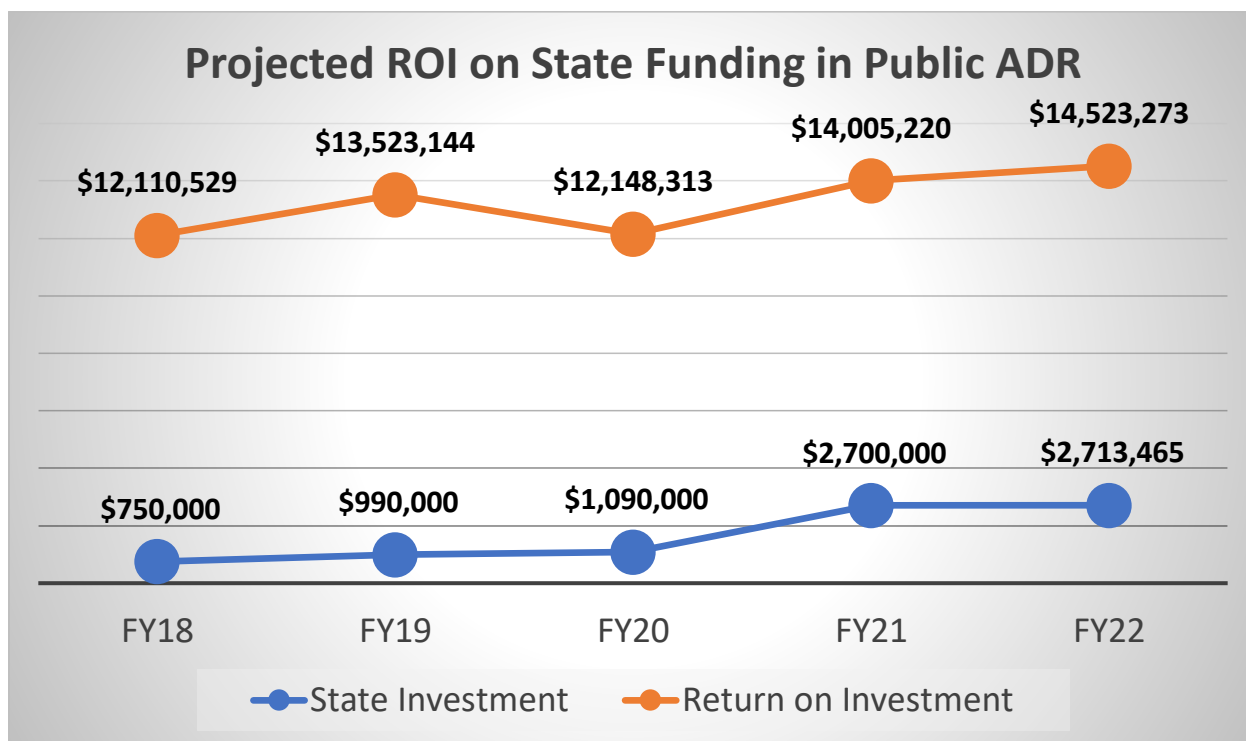
[3] Youth Program project grants, with a match requirement, support center staff, contractor and logistical costs for youth peer mediation and restorative justice projects in schools and communities that address critical areas of need in partnerships with cities and towns and community-based organizations and leverage diversified funding from public and private funders.

[4] Reentry Program grants support center staff and logistical costs for delivering pre-release reentry mediation services at state and county correctional facilities, including conducting orientations for incarcerated individuals, assessing cases, scheduling mediation sessions, assigning and overseeing mediators, and collecting and reporting data.

[5] Housing Program grants support center staff and logistical costs for delivering housing mediation services for matters referred by housing agencies, legal services and courts, including conducting outreach and intakes, making cross-referrals, assessing cases, scheduling mediation sessions, assigning and overseeing mediators, and collecting and reporting data.

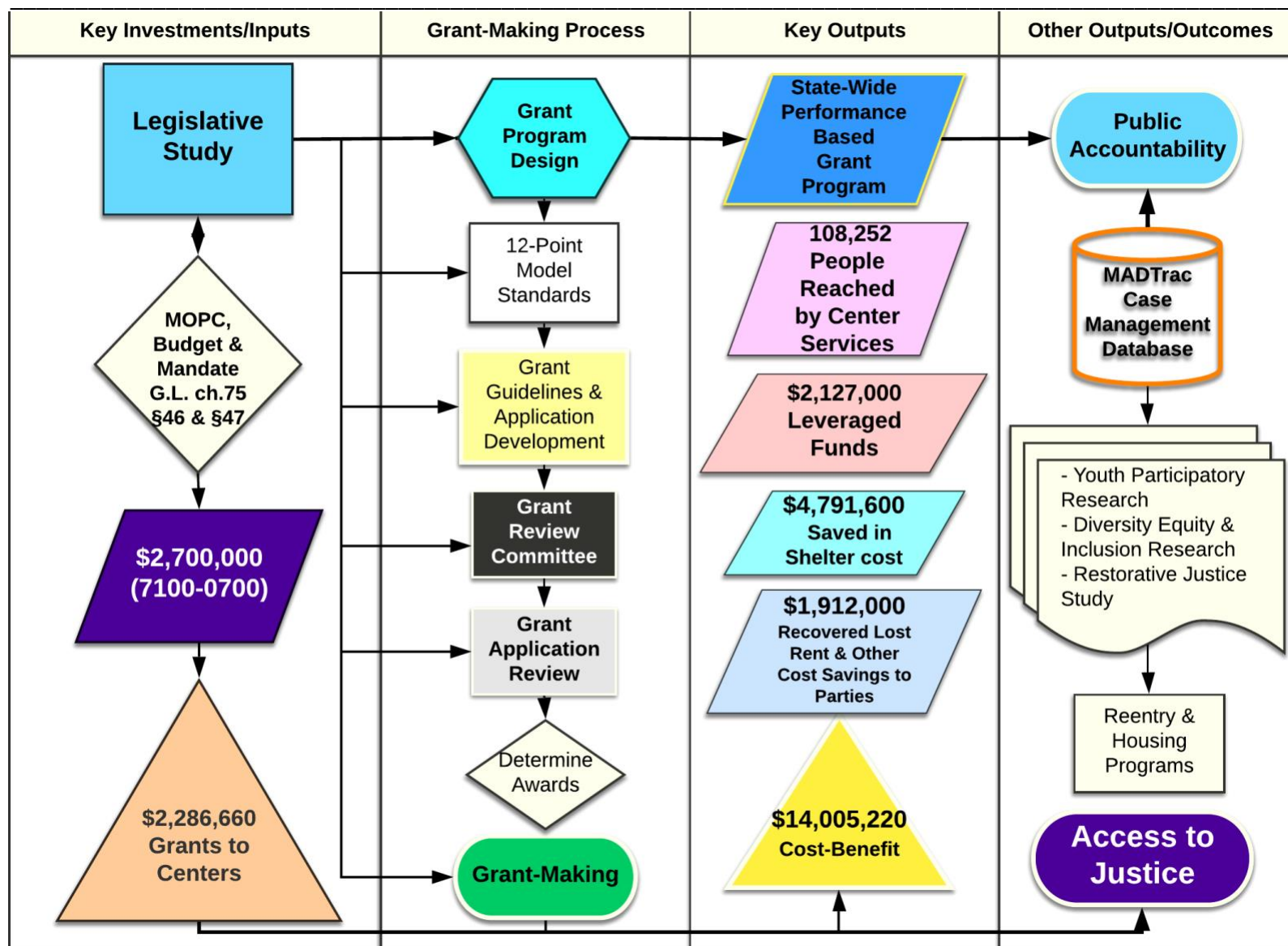
[6] Education seminars are for skill building of volunteer mediators, staff and board members, to enable centers to tackle a broader array of community problems. Seminars lay the foundation for excellence for MA community mediation services.

[7] Program management and administration includes grant-making, contract management, outreach/education, oversight of grant-funded centers and services. Program evaluation involves monitoring, data collection, evaluation, research and reporting to ensure quality programming and public accountability for investment and documentation of impact.



**Note:** The FY 2021 increased ROI was achieved during a year that included pandemic circumstances, because of the launch of the housing mediation program (HMP) that met the increased need for eviction and homelessness prevention mediation even as the demand for other dispute resolution services was depressed. Due to the continuation of the pandemic, the FY22 ROI projection reflects a 10% reduction due to the continuing limitations on service delivery.

## Overview of the MA Community Mediation Grant Program – FY 2021 Data



# **Massachusetts Community Mediation Center Grant Program**

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## **Fiscal Year 2021 Report & Evaluation**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration  
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy & Global Studies  
University of Massachusetts Boston**

**December 2021**

The Massachusetts Community Mediation Center Grant Program annual report to the state reports on implementation and impact of the program in its ninth year of operation. The report includes an account of program implementation activities and an evaluation of program impact and overall benefits to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.





## Executive Summary

The statutory Massachusetts Community Mediation Center Grant Program (G.L. ch.75 §47) effectively implements the Commonwealth's policy to promote broad statewide access to dispute resolution. This state-funded, performance-based Grant Program provides operating grants to local non-profit community mediation centers under the administration of the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) at the University of Massachusetts Boston, the state's statutory office of dispute resolution (G.L. ch.75 §46). The Grant Program goal is to advance the mission of community mediation as a cost-effective public service that increases access to justice. The FY 2021 Grant Program evaluation report prepared by MOPC for the ninth year of program operations confirms that the state's FY 2021 appropriation of \$2,700,000<sup>1</sup> greatly strengthened community mediation center operations statewide – particularly in the area of housing mediation services to help tenants and landlords adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the Governor's Eviction Diversion Initiative – while producing measurable social and economic impacts for the people of Massachusetts and a financial return on state investment totaling \$14 million in cost-savings and leveraged resources. That community mediation was able to generate this significant impact during a time of pandemic that caused the closure of courts, businesses and schools and forced a shift to remote operations and service delivery for the state-funded centers is a testament to the public value and cost-effectiveness of this local conflict resolution infrastructure. (The full FY 2021 Grant Program Evaluation Report is available on the MOPC website at: [www.umb.edu/mopc](http://www.umb.edu/mopc).)

### Findings

#### **1. Increased state funding strengthened community mediation infrastructure and sustained operations enabling centers to serve critical public needs during the ongoing pandemic.**

The substantial increase in the Grant Program's state appropriation supported meaningful investment in community mediation staffing and infrastructure in FY 2021. State funding enabled the continuation of operating grant awards with required matches of 40-55% to 12 local community mediation centers across the state based upon the quantity of services delivered, compliance with community mediation standards, and progress on goals to strengthen the centers' public service missions. The \$2,286,660 in state funding awarded to centers (85% of the appropriation) contributed substantially to their financial stability as local, affordable dispute resolution resources and to development of additional programming focused on housing stability, youth empowerment and prisoner re-entry. The total state operating grants averaged \$190,555 per center and comprised 51% of center incomes, and the Grant Program continued to be the largest single grant funding source. The positive effect of this funding was reported by centers across all categories of operations – center sustainability; staff numbers, hours, turnover, and professional development; mediator diversity and professional development; the number of active volunteer mediators, and fundraising. In FY 2021, the Grant Program was able to demonstrate that participating community mediation centers met both community mediation standards and the needs of local communities despite the ongoing challenging circumstances of the pandemic.

- Overall, center operations and services **changed for the better** in FY 2021.
- Centers operated with **more paid staff** in FY 2021 than in FY 2020; their staff workforce increased to 73% more full-timers and 5% more part-timers. There were 26 full-time staff in total across the

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<sup>1</sup> The state appropriation to the Community Mediation Grant Program was maintained in FY 2022 at \$2,713,465, which like the FY 2021 appropriation included a \$200,000 earmark of funding for the statewide re-entry mediation program for incarcerated individuals returning to the community.

12 centers for an average of 2.17 full-time staff per center and a total of 45 part-time staff, augmented by 27 administrative volunteers.

- Although fewer in FY 2021 than in FY 2020 due to the pandemic, there were **176 active volunteer mediators** across 12 centers from rosters collectively containing 364 volunteers. To recruit new mediators and retain current ones, centers held virtual trainings and educational opportunities.
- Staff and mediator **professional development** expanded at most centers.
- 10 centers reported that the **variety of disputes** addressed through centers' services increased because of their Grant Program grants.
- Expansion of Grant Program-related **programming** continued with 12 centers participating in and designating staff coordinators for the new housing mediation program to prevent homelessness, with 11 centers in the new reentry mediation program to reduce recidivism, and with 10 centers in the youth conflict resolution and restorative practices program to reduce youth violence and school suspensions.
- All 12 centers received Grant Program awards for supporting center-based and systemwide **diversity, equity, and inclusion** initiatives to broaden access and diversify mediators and parties served; 8 centers also participated in diversity research-related community listening sessions.

## **2. Grant Program-funded centers maintained remote service delivery to engage their communities due to pandemic limitations resulting in broader access to justice.**

Demand for center services continued to be lower than usual as the pandemic progressed from FY 2020 into FY 2021. Pandemic-related limitations on in-person interactions hindered utilization of center services. Centers worked to counter this pandemic effect through outreach efforts that relied heavily on remote activities in place of in-person events. Centers' efforts to publicize the availability of community mediation as well as their services largely took the form of trainings, educational initiatives, and distribution of written materials. Centers relied on remote technology to increase the use of their services. The option of virtual services allowed centers to avoid a hiatus in service delivery while offering greater convenience and increased access to parties by removing geographical and transportation barriers and providing flexibility of scheduling and attending mediation sessions. The limited number of courts that slowly opened and accepted remote ADR services over the year generated fewer referrals to community mediation than in FY 2020 when courts were fully operational during the first three quarters of that year. Notwithstanding the overall lower demand for center services in FY 2021, there was a steady upward climb in the demand for center services over the course of the year.

- All 12 centers **deployed remote technology** for service delivery and outreach to community members, the courts, government agencies and others in FY 2021.
- Remote technology enabled centers to offer their services to a **wider range of geographic locations** and the removal of transportation and temporal barriers allowed them to serve a **more diverse population**.
- Obstacles to the effective delivery of virtual services, such as inexperience in or lack of internet access, were addressed through extensive **preparation and adaptation by centers**, including training for mediators, staff, and parties. 11 centers offered training in conducting remote mediation to mediators.
- 11 centers reported that both **public awareness of mediation** and participation in trainings by members of the community increased.
- 10 centers reported that public **appreciation of community mediation** grew, and 9 centers found that community demand for services rose.

- Increased **referrals from community members** for help with housing issues resulted from a better understanding of how centers helped to connect people with housing resources.
- An estimated total of 1,279 **remote mediations**/mediation sessions were held by the centers from 1700 new cases opened by the centers in FY 2021.
- One-third of case referrals to centers came from the community with two-thirds coming from the courts. The percentage of community referrals was an increase over the 20% of FY 2020 community referrals.

### 3. The Grant Program's contribution to funded centers during the pandemic benefited parties served and the Commonwealth as a whole.

Over the course of FY 2021 the state funding awarded to community mediation centers through the Grant Program helped centers to increase the number of people reached through outreach and education as well as the number and diversity of people they served through mediation, training, and other services. Center services strengthened social capital by assisting disputing parties with resolving their disputes including repairing and restoring relationships. In particular, the pre-court and court-connected housing mediation services provided by the centers to tenants and landlords impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of the Governor's Eviction Diversion Initiative, helped the Commonwealth promote housing stabilization and homelessness prevention. During FY 2021 centers strove to expand services to parties who represented the diversity of the communities in their region with respect to such characteristics as gender, education, age, race, ethnicity, income level, among others, through a variety of initiatives.

- 3,119 parties from all 14 Massachusetts counties received mediation services during FY 2021.
- Disputing parties reached **agreement in 70% of center mediations**, exceeding the typical agreement rate of 66% for community mediation in general.
- Mediation benefited people economically through **\$1.5 million in monies returned** to citizens in cases referred to centers under the Attorney General's consumer mediation program.
- Large numbers of mediating parties reported **improvements in relationships**, decreased conflict and better communication between parties, and increased ability to handle disputes.
- **All major racial/ethnic groups** of the state's population (White, Hispanic/Latino, Black, and Asian) and people of all income levels (\$0-9,999 to more than \$65,000) were served by centers.
- 10 centers reported serving **more low-income or unserved/underserved** people in FY 2021.
- 8 centers engaged in **community listening sessions** to identify the impediments that prevented utilization of services by un/underserved community members. Language barriers, unfamiliarity with mediation, and discomfort with outsider assistance were some of the obstacles mentioned.
- **384,628 members of the public** were made aware of community mediation and center services through outreach efforts including social media, websites, presentations, conferences, fundraisers, newsletters, news articles, and television interviews.
- **4,666 people participated** in the 435 trainings, including training/educational workshops in conflict resolution, provided across the 12 centers.
- Parties received a **range of services** through the centers including mediation, conciliation, conflict coaching, peer mediation, and restorative practices, and disputes were referred through an **array of community partners** including schools, courts, non-profit agencies for a **broad variety of disputes**: business, juvenile, discrimination, family, government, housing, interpersonal, neighborhood, school, and workplace.

- **Broader segments of population** were served by centers through expanded programming under the Grant Program, including landlords and tenants, incarcerated persons, youth, and various minority groups, among others.

#### **4. State grants and collaborations contributed supported quality assurance and diversity initiatives for staff and mediators at funded centers to better address community needs.**

Community mediation centers funded through the Grant Program undertook a variety of activities to assure the quality of their mediation services in FY 2021, including online trainings, continuing education/ professional development, apprenticeships, evaluation of mediators, and ensuring compliance with competency and ethical standards. Centers also utilized trainings to recruit additional mediators. More mediation skills trainings were held in FY 2021 than in FY 2020 (35% increase) and the number of training participants also increased from the prior year (38% increase). Grant Program funding helped underwrite trainings and furnished opportunities for center staff and mediator learning and peer support. Additionally, funded centers continued their efforts to diversify their mediators, staff, and boards to better reflect the populations served, assisted by an MOPC Program manager with expertise in this area.

- Across the 12 funded centers 3,736 individuals participated in the 357 online **trainings** that focused on mediation skills, 400 received training in basic mediation, 1,074 were trained in advanced mediation, 2,196 participated in specialized mediation training, and 66 received peer mediation training. Another 930 individuals attended 78 **workshops** in conflict resolution.
- 11 centers offered mediators opportunities to hone their conflict resolution skills by providing for online **continuing education**.
- 8 centers adjusted their supervision of mediators, and 7 centers revised the administration of their mediator programs centers to **promote quality improvement**.
- **Diversity among the centers' mediators**, like the state's population, included females, males, Asians, African Americans/Blacks, Hispanics/Latinos, Whites, and multi-racial individuals, although most center mediators were female and White.
- Centers collaborated with each other for **quality assurance and professional development** through program learning communities in the areas of youth, reentry, housing, and DEI.
- Large majorities of parties surveyed were **satisfied** with their mediation (91%), were willing to recommend mediation to others (91%), and preferred mediation to alternative services (83%).

#### **5. Grant Program administration and implementation of new statewide programming by MOPC ensured that the Grant Program's statutory purpose was effectuated.**

In FY 2021, MOPC, the Grant Program administrator, carried out its statutory responsibilities, including grant-making and grant management, advocating for state funding, collecting data, assuring compliance, providing accountability, program development, and engaging in outreach. MOPC successfully designed and implemented new statewide programs that deployed community mediation infrastructure to address pressing public needs (homelessness, recidivism, youth violence, and systemic injustice) and leveraged additional resources for the community mediation system.

- The typical performance-based grant-making process was suspended due to pandemic-related constraints and a simplified **grant extension process** was temporarily implemented by MOPC. Following initial FY 2021 grant extensions based on FY 2020 funding levels, additional funding was awarded to centers in the form of **bonus awards** once the FY 2021 budget had been passed.

- **Legislative budget advocacy** involving a virtual State House briefing and outreach to legislators and the Governor's Office maintained the Grant Program state budget appropriation for FY 2022.
- The new statewide **housing mediation program**, implemented mid-year as a rapid response to the pandemic problems of eviction and homelessness, fielded 897 referrals and conducted 239 remote mediations in FY 2021 of which 133 resulted in tenancy preservations.
- Despite pandemic-related restrictions on outside visitors to correctional facilities, MOPC maintained MOUs for its pre-release **reentry mediation program** with DOC and 6 county Sheriffs and prepared for expansion to community-based post release services.
- MOPC's **youth program** supported centers in FY 2021 in finding innovative ways to engage youth online and respond to youth-related issues despite the limitations of the pandemic.
- MOPC made **outreach presentations** to statewide organizations, legal services, landlord associations, and others and worked with a marketing consultant to develop messaging about mediation that was added to the *Resolution Massachusetts* website.
- The **quality assurance system** for mediator excellence continued to be implemented through shared information and best practices, skill building trainings, peer mentoring, and program learning communities, all critical to centers in building capacity to deliver services for new housing and reentry programming and new methods for serving, youth, courts, and communities.
- In FY 2021 MOPC funded and supported center-based and MOPC-led **diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives** such as community listening sessions for diversity research.
- A software developer was engaged by MOPC to design a **new cloud-based data management system** to replace the current one to better meet the growing data demands of the Grant Program.
- Through quarterly reports to its advisory committee of stakeholders and an annual evaluation report to the state, MOPC **demonstrated accountability** for its Grant Program administration and impact.

## 6. State investment in community mediation resulted in economic benefits of \$14 Million.

Economic impact and return on investment from community mediation supported by the state-funded Grant Program shows significant cost-savings and leveraged resources for FY 2021 for a total return on investment of **\$14,005,220**:

**\$10,074,178 million in cost-savings** to citizens and public institutions in avoided & resolved conflicts:

\$4,791,600 saved in shelter costs from 88 avoided homeless shelter uses  
 \$1,912,000 in additional cost savings from 400 mediated cases recovering lost rent etc.  
 \$1,547,296 recovered by consumers from consumer mediations  
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\$483,960 leveraged by 758 volunteer mediators at 12 community mediation centers  
\$414,000 from re-investing in centers with established networks of volunteers, referral sources, funders  
\$46,060 from 2399 hours of pro bono administrative services from volunteer, board members, interns

### **Recommendations**

The FY 2021 evaluation report continues to demonstrate the link between State investment and service expansion/improvements across the community mediation network through foundational operating grants and additional program grants to centers. The ability of the Governor's Office to use existing established publicly funded dispute resolution infrastructure to serve important housing needs in the Commonwealth arising from the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that the Grant Program continues to be both responsive and relevant in an increasingly challenging world. A high rate of agreements reached in mediation and evaluation data indicating widespread party satisfaction both point to continued operational successes. The pandemic-related closure of courts, schools and correctional facilities continued to impact the overall volume of mediation activities and cases served but as the State began to re-open in the Fiscal Year 2021 case numbers showed a promising rebound. There continues to be a correlation between sufficient funding and stability of staffing which allows for delivery of services. The substantially increased funding in FY 2021 allowed centers to build their staffing capacity and helped centers offer a wider range of services to a broader segment of the public in partnership with more organizations, and thus increased contributions to access to justice while raising awareness and addressing significant social challenges. Once again, despite pandemic-related constraints, there were signs of growth and resilience in all four areas measured under the Twelve-Point Model of Community Mediation in MA (service, access, quality, and diversity). To ensure the continued availability of these benefits, it is recommended that:

- A. The Commonwealth should continue to sponsor and invest in community mediation through the Grant Program.** Increased operational and program grants in FY 2021 greatly enhanced the resiliency and sustainability of community mediation centers. The Community Mediation Center Grant Program continues to demonstrate its on-going value for public agencies, citizens, and communities even during the straitened circumstances arising from the coronavirus pandemic. Continued support in the form of operational, programmatic and infrastructure funding from the Commonwealth is critical.
- B. The Grant Program should continue to support centers' efforts to build public awareness of services.** Despite lack of access to face-to-face engagement with the public, community mediation centers have continued to expand their outreach via the use of social media as recommended in last year's evaluation to connect with the public. To build on expanded outreach, MOPC and funded centers should explore ways of clarifying and tailoring its messaging to encourage community mediation centers to be the first go-to resource for people in conflict.
- C. Centers should integrate learning from listening sessions with under-served communities into their culture and practices.** In FY 2021, community mediation centers embarked on a series of listening sessions with under-served communities, and this engagement generated valuable lessons about broadening diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Although ten centers reported an increase in service to these communities during FY 2021, there continues to be work that needs to be done. To widely serve, educate, attract volunteers, and engage members of these communities, this process of listening and learning should be expanded and reflected in all areas of center work.

- D. The community mediation model of services through volunteers should be assessed for impacts on diversity and inclusion.** During FY 2021, fewer people were willing to volunteer because of health-related concerns or lack of access to or knowledge about technology as well as cultural differences and economic challenges. The model of community mediation supported by the Grant Program is based on volunteerism. MOPC and funded centers should reflect on these challenges and the continued viability of the model and how it impacts efforts to dismantle structural racism. Appropriate strategies for increasing access and ability to participate should be explored, including compensation for mediators to cover time and expenses associated with volunteering to remove barriers. To measure success of these efforts, there needs to be expanded data gathering and the elimination of barriers to its collection.
- E. The Grant Program should investigate the value of establishing consistent training standards among centers to enhance the quality of community mediation services.** During FY 2021 community mediation centers put significant effort into adapting training to online platforms and building new skills for mediators around the use of technology as well as increasing the amount of training offered. Mediators can now mediate across the state and even over state boundaries because of remote service delivery, and there are many examples of collaboration and centers using each other's human resources and of Grant Program-funded programming across the state which actively promotes such collaboration. The current standards of training for mediators set by the Trial Court allow for a great deal of flexibility in approach, and each court-approved center is responsible for complying with court requirements. MOPC and funded centers should collaboratively consider whether there should be commonality and consistency of training quality standards and if so, establish ways to address this issue.
- F. Grant Program data gathering methods and technology should be updated and widened to highlight impact and value of state-sponsored community mediation.** Grant Program-funded community mediation centers are offering an ever-expanding range of services, including conflict coaching and restorative practices and, by virtue of new programming and remote service delivery, are significantly expanding the work of case coordinators who increasingly triage access to a range of other local resources for the parties they serve. The Grant Program needs an effective data gathering and reporting mechanism to demonstrate the importance of this expanded work and illustrate its value, which has grown since the Program's inception. The new cloud-based case management database system currently under development should allow for a wider range of data to be captured that reflects current and future practice and can support the demonstration of impact and value of services offered across the spectrum. Meanwhile, the current database system should be adjusted to allow such data to be recorded to the extent feasible.