

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CENTER FOR LAW AND EDUCATION awarded \$100,000
Boston nonprofit receives Cummings Foundation grant

BOSTON – The Center for Law and Education is pleased to announce it has been awarded highly competitive funding from the Cummings Foundation (<https://www.cummingsfoundation.org>) to prepare lay advocates to represent economically disadvantaged Boston public school students at disciplinary exclusion hearings.

“This support will address a significant gap in legal resources so that more Boston students can receive free legal assistance to counter excessively punitive practices for non-violent infractions that result in unnecessary suspensions from school,” said Kathleen Boundy, CLE co-director.

High rates of disciplinary exclusion and missed school days are associated with increased drop-out rates, lower graduation rates, and inadequate preparation for college/career readiness. African American/Black and Latino/Hispanic students are subjected to exclusionary discipline at far higher rates than white students enrolled in the Boston schools. “Many of these students already are academically struggling and behind their peers,” Boundy said. “They can least afford missed school days – and too often, all because they cannot afford legal representation at disciplinary hearings.”

Under Massachusetts law, a student facing removal from school for more than 10 days has a right to be represented by counsel or a lay advocate at a hearing at the student’s or family’s expense.

CLE’s project, Access to Justice through Lay Advocacy, will through training and support prepare about 20 non-lawyer volunteers – retirees, AmeriCorps fellows, and university students – to provide effective assistance to low-income students at disciplinary hearings. With hands-on training on student rights, due process hearings, and negotiation skills, these advocates can strategize with students, families and school personnel to develop proactive solutions that both ensure school safety and ensure the student remains in school. “It’s a win-win proposition,” said Boundy.

Moreover, the CLE project seeks to create a mentoring network for Boston students. Citing data that mentored youth are 52% more likely to complete homework, engage in school activities, and remain in school, Boundy said the lay advocates will also serve as mentors to help improve student performance across the academic, social, and behavioral spectrum.

The Cummings grant, announced last week, is the centerpiece of the foundation’s giving back approach – 100K for 100 non-profits. The 100K for 100 program supports nonprofits that are based in and primarily serve Middlesex, Essex, and Suffolk counties. Through this place-based initiative, Cummings Foundation aims to give back in the area where it owns commercial buildings, all of which are managed, at no cost to the Foundation, by its affiliate Cummings Properties.

“We are indebted to the nonprofit organizations like CLE that have a meaningful positive impact on the local communities where our colleagues and clients live and work,” said Joel Swets, Cummings Foundation’s executive director. “We are delighted to invest in their important programs and services.”

CLE, a nationally recognized Boston based resource, support and advocacy organization, strives to make the right of all students to quality education a reality and to help all students remain in school to master high standards. For almost 25 years, CLE was co-counsel with the NAACP in the Boston desegregation case.

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