

Marisol Garcia

30+ Years Advocating for Children

SUMMARY

- Over a decade of **executive level program management** experience
- **Two-plus decades of experience representing children in court** (Care & Protection, Child Requiring Assistance, Delinquency, and administrative hearings related to disability benefits and special education services)
- **Significant expertise in policy** areas related to child welfare, children's behavioral health, disability, special education, and the juvenile justice system
- **Experienced legislative advocate** and **skilled communicator**
- **Decades of experience building collaborative partnerships** with government agencies, juvenile courts, advocate organizations, children's healthcare providers, and community-based service providers to advance policies and programs that improve outcomes for children
- Fluent **Native Spanish speaker**

EDUCATION

Northeastern University School of Law

Juris Doctor, 1997

Providence College

B.A. English, Minor Sociology, 1994 (Magna Cum Laude)

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Health Law Advocates, Inc (2015 to present)

Deputy Director (2022 to present)

Senior Director (2021-2022)

Director/Managing Attorney (2017 to 2021)

Project Director/Senior Staff Attorney (2016 to 2017)

Mental Health Advocate (2015 to 2016)

Over the course of a decade, I developed the Mental Health Advocacy Program (MHAP) for Kids from a small pilot program with 2 staff attorneys based in 2 Juvenile Courts into an established, data-driven, high performing statewide program with 25 staff in 16 locations. As the Director of the MHAP for Kids Program, I am responsible for overall strategic direction as well as day to day operations.

Key accomplishments include:

- Establishing and refining a successful model that improves the physical and mental health of children and caregivers, as well as decreased involvement of children in child welfare and juvenile court systems and decreased use of inpatient psychiatric hospitalization and emergency mental health services by children.
- Increasing the capacity of the program by over 900% by expanding statewide – doubling the size of the parent organization in 4 years while significantly increasing state funding to support the expansion.
- Leading legislative advocacy efforts, securing over \$15 million in state public funding through an established earmark while establishing MHAP for Kids as both a credible source of information as well as a trusted partner on policy areas related to children’s mental health and the juvenile justice system.
- Building and maintaining positive working relationships with key partners, including the Juvenile Court, Department of Children & Families, Department of Youth Services, Probation Department, Department of Mental Health, MassHealth, JDAI, and the Office of the Child Advocate.
- Hiring, coaching, developing, and retaining a high performing team, including attorneys, paralegals, and administrative staff, as well as numerous law and MPH interns.
- Establishing organizational structures necessary to support a rapidly expanding team, including staff training, human resources, and internal policies and procedures.
- Improving marketing and identifying new funders, resulting in over half a million dollars in new grants.
- Working with the Director of External Engagement to respond to media inquiries and create videos, social media messaging, newsletters, and other communications to inform and mobilize supporters.
- Developing an innovative special education legal strategy during COVID-19, highlighted as a national model by the American Bar Association.
- Pioneering a groundbreaking partnership with Boston Children’s Hospital to advocate for children boarding in their emergency department.

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

Law Office of Ronald Eskin (2012 to 2015)

Attorney

- Represented children and adults in highly successful administrative hearings before the Social Security Administration for SSI and SSDI benefits.

Law Office of Marisol Garcia (1999 to 2012)

Attorney

- Sole practitioner providing high quality counsel and zealous representation for youth and parent clients as attorney and Guardian ad Litem specializing in juvenile delinquency, care & protection, and child requiring assistance cases.

- CAFL and YAD Bar Advocate (Middlesex & Essex Counties). Certified by CPCS for over 15 years, serving a significant number of bilingual clients in their native language. Specialized in representing dually-involved youth.
- Created and led effective defense teams including investigators, experts, and social workers to explore every aspect of a case from supporting the client in the community, meeting with and assessing witnesses, developing legal strategies and theories, to in-court representation of clients in juvenile delinquency cases.

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts, Inc (1997 to 1999)

MLAC Bart J. Gordon Fellow & Staff Attorney

- Represented children and youth in court and administrative forums in care & protection, special education, school exclusion, delinquency, CRA, and public assistance matters.
- Trained and mentored Pro Bono attorneys in education law as well as administered and supervised the internship program for law students.
- Developed informational materials and conducted legal workshops on education, delinquency, CRAs, and child welfare law in both English and Spanish.
- Coordinated outreach to the Latino community through Spanish print, radio, and television media.

Abortion Access Project (1997)

Legal Intern

U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit (1996)

Legal Intern for The Honorable Bruce M. Seyla

Greater Boston Legal Services (1996)

Legal Intern

Children's Law Center of Massachusetts, Inc (1995)

Legal Intern

Court Appointed Special Advocate (1992-1993)

Volunteer

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Boston University School of Public Health (2022 to 2025)

- Instructor for Introduction to Mental Health Advocacy.
- Planned and taught a course to assist Master's level Public Health students learn how advocacy works in the fields of mental health and substance use.

William James College (2009 to 2015)

- Adjunct faculty member for Consultation and Testimony in Forensic Psychology.
- Planned and conducted mock competency and civil commitment hearings for Master's Level Forensic Counseling Students to train them how to testify as expert witnesses.

University of Massachusetts at Lowell (2010 to 2013)

- Adjunct faculty member in the political science program

- Instructing 2 courses in Introduction to American Politics

STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

American Bar Association Children's Rights Litigation Committee (2024 to present)

Co-Chair and Committee Member

JDAI Race, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee (2021 to present)

Co-chair and Subcommittee Member

Massachusetts Juvenile Court Improvement Task Force (2021 to present)

Task Force Member

American Bar Association Children's Rights Legal Committee (2018 to present)

Education Subcommittee Member

Northeastern University School of Law: Center for Public Interest Advocacy and Collaboration (2019 to present)

Mapping the Cradle to Prison Pipeline Advisory Board Member

TRAININGS & INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Addressing Violence Against Children Within Systems: Time for New Solutions (June 2025)

Sponsored by the American Bar Association Litigation Section

Panel Member presenting on structural violence against children in the US and discussing themes from the 5th Edition of the World Congress on Justice With Children

Changing the Game: Transforming Mental Health Systems for Kids and Families (August 2024)

Sponsored by National Association of Counsel for Children

Presenter at 47th National Child Welfare Law Conference for child welfare lawyers, judges, and others to transform mental health systems to serve children with mental health needs.

Treating Kids Like Kids: Ending the Prosecution of Young Children (April 2024)

Sponsored by Association of Children's Residential and Community Services

Presenter on avoiding juvenile court and incarceration by implementing evidence based innovative best practice responses to youth mental and behavioral health needs.

Reducing Disparities and Centering Equity in School Behavioral Health Through Effective Engagement of Student and Families (December 2023)

Sponsored by the Children's Mental Health Campaign and the BIRCh Project at UMASS

Plenary Facilitator at the Massachusetts School-Based Behavioral Health Summit.

Smart Justice (August 2023)

Sponsored by Hackett Center for Mental Health and Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Presenter at Children's Mental Health Summit on issues of children's mental health and the nexus with court involvement.

Behavioral Health Reform (June 2023)

Sponsored by the Boston Bar Association

Panelist on Massachusetts Behavioral Health Reform and the impact on children at Health Law Conference.

Services Without State Intervention (May 2023)

Sponsored by the Massachusetts Bar Association

Panelist on stopping the cradle to prison pipeline when seeking services for children at Sixth Annual Juvenile and Child Welfare Conference.

Just Say “NO” to CRAs! (May 2023)

Sponsored by the Parent Professional Advocacy League

Presenter at 12th Annual Conference on Child Requiring Assistance Juvenile Court matters.

Future of Children’s Lawyering (November 2022)

Sponsored by American Bar Association Children’s Rights Committee

Panelist on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion faced by lawyers who practice in juvenile justice and child welfare courts

Community, Collaboration, and Advocacy (October 2022)

Sponsored by the Children’s Hospital Association

Lecturer at the Annual Behavioral Health Summit of national children’s hospitals on mental health advocacy and ongoing partnership with Boston Children’s Hospital

Children’s Behavioral Health Summit (October 2022)

Sponsored by Boston Children’s Hospital and Massachusetts Association for Mental Health

Panelist on “Resources for Children with the Most Complex Needs”

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A Focus on Impact (June 2021)

Sponsored by MassHealth and the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation

Panelist on “MassHealth and Schools and School-Aged Children, Teens, and Young Adults”

Addressing Financial and Legal Problems to Improve the Mental Health of Adults and Children in the Pandemic (May 2021)

Sponsored by the National Center for Medical Legal Partnership

Lecturer presenting data on the efficacy of our program as an intervention to reduce suicidality.

Useful Strategies in Juvenile Court Clinic’s Report Writing to Aid Access to DMH, DDS, DCF and SPED services and Ongoing Advocacy (May 2021)

Sponsored by the Massachusetts Juvenile Court Clinic

Lecturer educating juvenile court clinicians on how to draft appropriate recommendations and evidentiary reports to ensure youth access necessary mental health and social services.

Cradle to Prison Pipeline Child Welfare and Legal System Involvement (January 2021)

Sponsored by Boston Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Volunteers

Lecturer on the juvenile justice system, child welfare risk factors for court involvement, and access to diversion programs

Accessing Early Childhood Special Education Services (October 2020)

Sponsored by the Children’s Mental Health Campaign

Lecturer presenting legal strategies and tools for preventing children falling through the cracks during the global pandemic.

Advocating for Special Education Services During COVID-19 (July 2020)

Sponsored by Boston Children's Hospital

Presenter educating medical providers about the educational rights of children during the pandemic.

Advocating for Special Education Needs: Best Practices to Support Children in a Time of Crisis Webinar (April 2020)

Co-sponsored by Alliance for Children's Rights and ABA Children's Rights Committee

Lecturer/ Panel Member invited to present the MHAP model as a best practice at the National Conference to over 600 participants.

Cradle to Prison Pipeline Conference (November 2019)

Sponsored by Northeastern University School of Law

Lecturer/ Panel Member invited to present outcome data from the program to illustrate efficacy in diverting youth from the juvenile justice system.

Mass Bar Association 3rd Annual Juvenile and Child Welfare Conference (May 2019)

Delivered Closing Remarks at annual juvenile justice and child welfare conference.

Panel member discussing impact of school policing and the school to prison pipeline.

Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education – School Law Conference (May 2016)

Lecturer/Panel member at the annual conference School Law Conference for attorneys that provide representation to students with special needs.

Suffolk University School of Law; Boston, MA (April 2011)

Lecturer and panel member at Annual Juvenile Justice Center Children on Trial Conference:

"Evidentiary Issues: Teens, Social Media and Cell Phones". Reviewed relevant statutes as well as identified community resources on the panel entitled: "Dispositional Alternatives for Juveniles and Interaction and Assistance at Disposition Hearing."

Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education – Juvenile Law Basics (February 2010)

Lecturer and panel member at training seminar for CPCS appointed counsel providing representation to indigent litigants appearing in the Juvenile Court. Developed pertinent materials including sample motions and memorandums of law.

American Bar Association (March 2009)

National Spring Teleconference Panel Member on topic of "Breathing Life into Federal Reforms – Utilizing the 'Fostering Connections to Success Act' To Improve Outcomes for Foster Children."

PUBLICATIONS

Medicaid Won't Cover That (and Other Misconceptions) (August 2024)

American Bar Association Children's Rights Litigation Committee

Protecting Kids from the Upcoming Exclusion Epidemic (August 2021)

American Bar Association Children's Rights Litigation Committee

Mind the Gap: Kids at Risk for Falling Through the Cracks in Transition to Early Childhood Special Education from Early Intervention (December 2020)

American Bar Association Children's Rights Litigation Committee

Advocating for Youth Access to Mental Health Services During a Pandemic (June 2020)

Presented White Paper at ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty Spring Meeting.
Highlighted as a best practice model nationally.

Advocating for Special Education Services During COVID-19 (April 2020)

American Bar Association Children's Rights Litigation Committee

Fighting Fear of Trump Administration's Immigration Policies with Facts (December 2019)

American Bar Association Children's Rights Litigation Committee

Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline (September 2018)

American Bar Association Children's Rights Litigation Committee

COMMUNITY SERVICE

School Committee Member: Westford, MA (May 2022 to May 2025)

- Elected and served as a member of the School Committee.
- Member of the Finance Committee and DEI Committee.
- Duties include biweekly meetings, overseeing the work of the School Superintendent, deciding the disposition of all issues related to the management of the school district and participating in town meetings.

St. Jude Hero Ambassador (2016 to present)

- Marathon runner fundraising over \$40,000 for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

AWARDS

Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly Top Women of Law (2022)