

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Massachusetts's "Walk to the Hill"

Each year, the Massachusetts Bar Association organizes a walk to the state's capitol hill in Boston as a show of support for initiatives providing legal services to the poor. Massachusetts attorneys, both young and old, join together in this event to meet and influence elected officials.

"We do this to promote access to justice," said Kyle Guelcher, Massachusetts Bar Association YLD Chair-Elect. Guelcher explained that "it's our responsibility to tell legislators what's happening . . . about the problems faced by the poor."

As in every state, the poor of Massachusetts face a gap in their ability to access the court system and obtain the representation they need on important issues such as housing, health care, public benefits, and other civil matters. The Massachusetts YLD along with the Massachusetts Bar Association are tackling this issue head-on. First, they look at what lawyers can do individually by promoting pro bono work. But this is not enough. The Massachusetts YLD and the Massachusetts Bar Association also seek to make public policy changes by lobbying state and federal officials to improve access to justice and fund free legal service providers.

"Young lawyers have a lot of power—more power than most know," said Guelcher. Whether young lawyers appreciate the fact or not their voices carry great weight with elected leaders. When young lawyers join as a group to promote an issue, such as full funding for legal services, it can become a great power to effectuate positive change. Young Lawyers "have a responsibility to use that power."

Guelcher first understood that responsibility the day he was sworn in as an attorney. On that day, his family came from out of state to witness the special occasion. They took a cab ride and Guelcher found himself talking with the native Haitian cab driver.

"I'll never forget what he said to me," Guelcher told *The Affiliate*. "He said: 'I hope that one day you will help the people of Haiti.'" Guelcher said the Haitian's statement has stuck with him because it made him realize what having a law degree meant. "It was profound because he was telling me I had the power to effectuate change."

Guelcher, who is also one of Massachusetts's delegates to the ABA House of Delegates, encourages young lawyers to not only be part of lobbying efforts to promote legal services to the indigent but also to use lobbying to effect other important changes.