



20 WEST STREET, BOSTON, MA 02111-1204 • COMMUNICATIONS@MASSBAR.ORG

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Jan. 12, 2016

CONTACT: Jason Scally (617) 338-0682 / Mike Vigneux (617) 338-0675

Massachusetts Bar Association Joins Fight Against Opioid Epidemic with Legal Assistance Helpline in Norfolk County

*Pilot project offers residents access to free lawyers when seeking
court-ordered inpatient treatment for addicted friends, family*

BOSTON, Mass. — The Massachusetts Bar Association (MBA) has launched a free legal assistance program in Norfolk County to help county residents who are seeking court-ordered inpatient treatment for a family member or friend struggling with opioid and other alcohol or drug addictions.

The MBA program offers assistance with a state law, known as “Section 35” (Mass. Gen. Laws Ch. 123, Section 35), which permits individuals to petition the courts to involuntarily commit substance abusers to an inpatient treatment program when their alcohol or drug use puts themselves or others at risk. A substance abuser can be sent to a treatment program for up to 90 days if a judge determines, following a hearing and a review of medical evidence, that there is a “likelihood of serious harm” to themselves or others.

Norfolk County residents can contact the MBA’s Section 35 Helpline, available toll-free at (844) 843-6221, or via email at HelpUs@MassBar.org, where they will be put in touch with volunteer lawyers, who will assist them *pro bono* (for free) with their Section 35 petitions, up to and including going to court.

The Section 35 Helpline, the first of its kind in the commonwealth, is currently being run as a pilot program, and *pro bono* lawyers are only available to Norfolk County residents. Norfolk District Attorney Michael Morrissey recently said the number of people who have died from opioid overdoses in Norfolk County has more than doubled the total from two years ago. (See: “Opioid deaths in Norfolk County show big rise,” *Boston Globe*, Dec. 16, 2015.)

“Having a loved one ‘sectioned’ and forced into treatment is not an easy thing to do and often viewed as a last resort to save someone’s life. No one should have to go through this alone,” said MBA President Robert W. Harnais, who created the program. “Our Helpline ensures that, for the first time, the people closest to the devastation caused by opioid addiction — the addict’s friends and family members — have the support and legal help they need to navigate this powerful process.”

The MBA is distributing information about the Section 35 Helpline to South Shore hospitals and the nearly 30 city and town police departments in Norfolk County. The Quincy Fire Department has also added Helpline information to its Opioid Recovery Resource Guide. Dozens of MBA lawyers in Norfolk County have already volunteered to take calls and cases that come in from the Section 35 Helpline. The MBA has also scheduled an additional training in January for volunteer lawyers to supplement an earlier training held in Norfolk County.

More information about the Section 35 Helpline Norfolk County Pilot Project can be found at www.MassBar.org/NorfolkHelpline.

Incorporated in 1911, the Massachusetts Bar Association is a non-profit organization that serves the legal profession and the public by promoting the administration of justice, legal education, professional excellence and respect for the law. The MBA represents a diverse group of attorneys, judges and legal professionals across the commonwealth.