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# Massachusetts Community Mediation Center Grant Program Fiscal Year 2024 Report and Evaluation

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# **Massachusetts Community Mediation Center Grant Program**

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## **Fiscal Year 2024 Report and Evaluation**

**Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration  
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global  
College of Liberal Arts  
University of Massachusetts, Boston**

**January 2025**

The Massachusetts Community Mediation Center Grant Program annual report to the state reports on implementation and impact of the Program in its 12<sup>th</sup> 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.

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## Executive Summary

Through the passage of MGL c.75, §47 in 2013, the Massachusetts state government established the Community Mediation Center Grant Program (CMC Grant Program or Program) to provide accessible and affordable dispute resolution services across the Commonwealth. Administered by the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC), the statutory state dispute resolution office at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston), the CMC Grant Program supports 12 community mediation centers (Centers) statewide through operational and program-specific grants. These Centers provide free or low-cost dispute resolution services that address critical issues such as homelessness, recidivism, youth violence, and systemic injustice while advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals under the Program's Twelve-Point Model.

In FY2024, the Commonwealth allocated \$3,213,465 to the CMC Grant Program, supplemented by \$149,674 carried over from FY2023, for a total of \$3,363,139. Of the total funding, \$2,542,100 (76%) was awarded to Centers in grants and technical assistance, with Centers leveraging these funds to secure an additional \$2,199,813 from private foundations and other state, local, and federal sponsors. These grants supported Centers' participation in CMC Grant Program related statewide programs, including the Housing Mediation Program (HMP), Reentry Mediation Program (ReMAp), Youth Conflict Resolution and Restorative Practices Program (Youth Program), and DEI organizational capacity-building initiatives. These grants bolstered staffing infrastructure, enabling Centers to meet community needs and accounting for over half of their collective revenue, making this state funding vital for Center sustainability and statewide access to dispute resolution for Massachusetts residents.

The CMC Grant Program had a significant impact in FY2024. The HMP preserved 355 tenancies and 103 housing subsidies across 1,487 mediated cases, helping 1,188 landlords and 1,376 tenants avoid eviction or housing loss. As one tenant shared, "Thanks to mediation, I've been able to get things under control. I will definitely recommend it to others, this is a wonderful program." A pilot partnership with MassHousing's Tenancy Assistance Program (TAP) expanded the program's reach by mediating 12 upstream cases involving issues like noise complaints and discrimination and conducting community-building workshops to equip residents at TAP-enrolled sites with conflict resolution skills. ReMAp worked with 12 DOC and Sheriff facilities, providing pre-release mediation and expanding post-release support to reduce recidivism and strengthen family ties. Party feedback reflected the program's impact, with one noting, "Today was a good day," and another commenting, "This was great and productive." The Youth Program showed significant gains in student social and emotional learning skills, with one administrator highlighting the program's long-term value: "These are lifelong skills that can be applied in both school and life situations." The DEI Initiative further enhanced the Program's impact, with Centers improving language accessibility, program flexibility, and policies to support inclusivity and equity. For example, this included the development of Spanish-language conflict resolution workshops, which led to an increase in inquiries from Spanish-speaking individuals. As one Center noted, "We've been able to better train staff and volunteers and provide services in ways community members understand."

To ensure continued sustainability, the CMC Grant Program supported workforce development and mediator recruitment in FY2024. Centers operated with an average of three full-time and three part-

time staff, with 226 active volunteer mediators from a pool of 400. Staffing numbers and hours increased at many Centers, with 83% reporting stable or growing staff levels. However, key staffing needs remained, including funding for salary increases (83%), benefits (58%), and professional development (83%). Volunteer recruitment was also crucial, with five Centers increasing their active mediators to a total of 226 up from 207 in FY2023, ensuring continued service quality across the Program.

To promote mediator excellence, most Centers implemented activities to enhance mediator expertise. These included mentorship programs (92%), continuing education (83%), formal recognition of mediators (75%), improved administration (67%), and expanded supervision and performance assessments (58%). Centers also benefited from MOPC's learning communities, which fostered collaboration and professional growth. The Trainer Development Project (TDP) provided targeted coaching to 15 participants across six Centers, further building skills and capacity.

Diversity among mediators and parties served improved in FY2024, with 34% of 382 mediators identifying as non-White, up from 31% in FY2023, and 47% of 7,002 parties served identifying as non-White. Five Centers reported increased mediator diversity, while six maintained stable levels, reflecting ongoing efforts to align with state demographics and broaden their reach.

The CMC Grant Program also expanded access to mediation services through a hybrid model, offering both remote and in-person options to meet diverse community needs. Most cases (3,386 out of 4,530, or 75%) were provided free of charge, while four Centers used sliding scale fees in 191 cases to accommodate financial need. CMC Grant Program support enabled nine of 12 Centers to maintain or expand these options, ensuring cost was not a barrier to accessing services.

Centers continued to prioritize outreach, education and training to empower communities and build resilience. All 12 Centers maintained a strong presence through social media and websites, while most distributed literature (e.g., brochures and newsletters), and participated in workshops, presentations, and conferences. Centers conducted 498 trainings—including basic, advanced, specialized, peer, and conflict resolution workshops—reaching an estimated 5,018 participants and fostering cultural shifts toward collaborative problem-solving. Outreach efforts, including fundraising, newsletters, social media engagement, conferences, and website content, reached 407,499 people, with 274,422 receiving materials from four Centers, totaling 681,921 people informed about community mediation services.

The Program addressed a wide range of disputes, from business and housing to family and reentry, reflecting its ability to meet evolving community needs. Mediated cases increased from 2,029 in FY2023 to 2,305 in FY2024. Alternative methods such as conflict coaching, peer mediation, and restorative practices were offered in addition to mediation. These efforts were supported by referrals from 78% of Massachusetts Trial Court divisions and various community sources, including correctional facilities, schools, and local non-profits.

Party satisfaction underscored the Program's success, with 70% of mediated cases resulting in full or partial agreements. Of 958 parties surveyed, 91% were satisfied with the process, 94% would recommend it, and 81% preferred mediation over alternative services, demonstrating strong trust in the approach. Mediation programs in consumer, landlord-tenant, parenting, and agricultural disputes

supported by the state-funded Centers also generated significant benefits, including \$3.4 million recovered in consumer and landlord-tenant cases. These programs helped parties develop parenting plans and sustain community farms, leveraging CMC Grant Program infrastructure and additional funding sources.

In FY2024, the CMC Grant Program also generated significant economic benefits, with a return of \$30,404,747 from a state investment of \$3,213,465. This nearly tenfold return highlights the Program's broad societal and economic impact, generating \$9.46 in savings and leveraged resources for every \$1 invested.

To further strengthen the Program, several recommendations are made: increase funding to sustain operations and expand programs like HMP and ReMAp; invest in DEI initiatives to improve access for underserved communities; build capacity for specialized services; foster collaboration among Centers; fully integrate the new Resolution Activity Manager (RAM) database system for improved data collection and decision-making; and continue investing in data technologies to measure long-term outcomes and demonstrate the Program's impact. These strategies will ensure the continued success and growth of the CMC Grant Program and the state-funded Centers, further empowering communities across Massachusetts.

# 1 Introduction

Through the passage of MGL c.75, §47 in 2013, the Massachusetts state government committed to expanding access to dispute resolution across the Commonwealth by establishing the state-sponsored Community Mediation Center Grant Program (CMC Grant Program or Program). The CMC Grant Program provides a sustainable funding framework that enables public and private investment in locally accessible and affordable mediation services and programming. The Program's purpose is to broaden the utilization of community mediation by providing operational support through grants to qualified community mediation centers (Centers). These Centers deliver free or low-cost dispute resolution services using trained community volunteers (MGL c.75, §47(a)).

State support for the CMC Grant Program is provided through an annual budget appropriation, which in FY2024 amounted to \$3,213,465, marking the Program's 12th year of operation. This funding continues to ensure the sustainability of Centers across Massachusetts by making high-quality, accessible dispute resolution services available to the public and enabling government agencies and courts to draw on this state-sponsored infrastructure for dispute resolution programming.

## 2 Grant Program Administration

The Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston) serves as the statutory state dispute resolution agency responsible for administering the CMC Grant Program in accordance with MGL c.75, §47(b) & (c). MOPC's statutory duties include awarding operational grants to qualified Centers through an established application process and state contracting protocols, reporting on program activities and accomplishments, and convening an advisory committee to support the Program.

Additionally, MOPC is authorized to advocate for CMC Grant Program funding, organize quality assurance measures to ensure mediator excellence, and conduct program evaluation and reporting for the state. These responsibilities enable MOPC to sustain and strengthen the Program's operations while ensuring accountability and high standards in community mediation services.

### 2.1 Grant Application Process

MOPC's core responsibilities as the CMC Grant Program administrator include developing a performance-based grant application process to allocate funds based on Centers' eligibility, track record, and compliance with grant procedures, and consulting with Centers on grant criteria (MGL c.75, §47(c) & (d)).

In FY2024, MOPC completed the second year of a two-year Grant Application Request (GAR) process (FY2023-2024) for pre-qualified Centers and in addition, issued a GAR for new Centers which did not generate any applicants. For FY2023, MOPC had awarded operational grants (baseline, performance, and database) based on Center compliance with the Massachusetts Twelve-Point Model standards (Table 1), caseload data, and SMART goal progress. MOPC had also awarded FY2023 state-funded program and project grants for Youth, Reentry, Housing, and DEI initiatives based on compliance with staffing, outreach, procedural requirements, and strong proposals.

**Table 1. Massachusetts Twelve-Point Model of Community Mediation**

Category	Criteria used for FY2023-2024 Grant Application Request
Service to the community	1-Provide a range of mediation services to address community needs, including but not limited to housing, consumer, family, neighborhood, peer/youth, and workplace mediation.
	2-Establish collaborative community relationships with other service providers to meet community needs.
	3-Educate community members about conflict resolution and mediation.
	4-Work with the community in center governance and center development (including fundraising) by involving community members as staff, volunteers, board members and project partners.
Providing accessible services	5-Provide mediation and conflict resolution services at no cost or on a sliding scale.
	6-Hold mediations in neighborhoods where disputes occur.
	7-Schedule mediations at a time convenient to the participants.
	8-Provide mediation at any stage in a dispute - including the early use of mediation for conflict prevention and collaborative problem-solving.
Providing quality services	9-Maintain high quality mediation services by providing intensive, skills-based training, apprenticeships, continuing education and on-going evaluation of volunteer mediators.
Reflecting diversity	10-Train community members, who reflect the community’s diversity with regard to age, race, gender, ethnicity, income and education, to serve as volunteer mediators.
	11-Provide mediation, education and other conflict resolution services to community members who reflect the community’s diversity with regard to age, race, gender, ethnicity, income, education and geographic location.
	12-Mediate community-based disputes that come from diverse referral sources, such as community organizations, police, faith-based institutions, courts, community members, government agencies and others.

For FY2024, MOPC renewed FY2023 grant awards based on Center SMART goal updates, year-end data reports, and changes impacting grant commitments. Additional state funding to address higher staffing costs was distributed to Centers proportionately based on FY2023 grant award totals. MOPC



also issued two rounds of operational bonus awards to distribute the funding that had been originally intended to fund new Centers (see Table 2).

**Table 2. FY2024 Funded Centers and Grants Awarded**

Funded Community Mediation Centers	Grants Awarded
Cape Cod Dispute Resolution Center ( <b>Cape Mediation</b> ) in Orleans	Operational, Youth, bonus awards
Collaborative Resolutions Group ( <b>CRG</b> ) in Greenfield	Operational, Housing, Reentry, Youth, DEI, bonus awards
Community Dispute Settlement Center ( <b>CDSC</b> ) in Cambridge	Operational, Housing, Reentry, Youth, DEI, bonus awards
Family Services of Central Massachusetts Mediation Program ( <b>FSCM</b> ) in Worcester	Operational, Housing, bonus awards
Greater Brockton Center for Dispute Resolution ( <b>GBCDR</b> ) in Brockton	Operational, Housing, bonus awards
Martha’s Vineyard Mediation Program ( <b>MVMP</b> ) in Vineyard Haven	Operational, Housing, Reentry, Youth, DEI, bonus awards
Mediation Services of North Central MA ( <b>MSI</b> ) in Leominster	Operational, Housing, Reentry, Youth, DEI, bonus awards
Metropolitan Mediation Services ( <b>MMS</b> ) in Brookline	Operational, Housing, Reentry, Youth, bonus awards
MetroWest Mediation Services ( <b>MWMS</b> ) in Framingham	Operational, Housing, Reentry, Youth, DEI, bonus awards
Middlesex Community College Law Center ( <b>MCC</b> ) in Lowell	Operational, Housing, Youth, DEI, bonus awards
The Resolution Center ( <b>TRC</b> ) in Beverly	Operational, Housing, Reentry, Youth, DEI, bonus awards
UpSide413 ( <b>U413</b> ) ( <i>previously BCRHA</i> ) in Pittsfield	Operational, Housing, Youth, bonus awards

During FY2024, MOPC separately contracted with two Centers for technical assistance and consultation related to the development of the new RAM activity manager database and with one Center for housing training and consultation.

To prepare for the FY2025 grant cycle, MOPC reconvened the GAR Redesign Committee with three CMC Director representatives and collaborated on updates to existing grant metrics and new grant categories.

## 2.2 Program Spending

The CMC Grant Program’s FY2024 state budget appropriation was \$3,213,465. Combined with the prior FY2023 appropriation of \$149,674, the total funding amounted to \$3,363,139 (see Table 3).

Of the FY2024 total appropriation, 76% (\$2,542,100) was awarded to Centers, distributed as follows: \$1,296,000 in unrestricted operational awards<sup>1</sup>, \$340,000 in youth awards, \$575,000 in housing awards, \$162,500 in reentry awards, \$100,000 in DEI awards, \$30,000 in RAM technical assistance contracts, and \$38,600 for training services delivered to Centers through MOPC for reentry and housing mediation and trainer development.

The remaining 24% (\$821,039) was allocated to MOPC for grant program administration, with \$86,737 requested to carry over into FY2025 as a prior appropriation continued for purposes of completing the development of the RAM activity manager database.

**Table 3. FY2024 MA CMC Grant Program Spending**

<b>A. Operating, Program Grants and Technical Assistance to Centers</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>
Operating Grants to Centers	\$1,296,000
Diversity Grants to Centers	\$100,000
Youth Grants to Centers	\$340,000
Reentry Grants to Centers	\$162,500
Housing Grants to Centers	\$575,000
Activity Manager Database (RAM) Technical Team	\$30,000
Training for Statewide Programs & Trainer Development	\$38,600
<b>Subtotal (76%)</b>	<b><u>\$2,542,100</u></b>
<b>B. Program Management, Administration and Evaluation Expenses to MOPC</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>

<sup>1</sup> The funding distribution included \$240,000 in proportionate salary awards for all 12 Centers, \$60,000 in an initial operating bonus award (\$5,000 per Center for 12 Centers), and \$176,000 in a second operating award (\$16,000 per Center accepted by 11 Centers). Of those, nine Centers allocated bonus funds to support programs, while two directed the funds toward new CMC Grant Program initiatives linked to the Twelve-Point Model.

Program Admin, Mgt, Evaluation Staff and Logistical Expenses	\$734,302
Carried Over to FY2025 to Complete Database ( <i>pending</i> )	\$86,737
<b>Subtotal (24%)</b>	<b><u>\$821,039</u></b>
<b><u>Total FY2024 State Funding</u></b> (includes \$149,674 from FY2023)	<b><u>\$3,363,139</u></b>

The administration of the CMC Grant Program and related statewide programs extended beyond fund distribution to include comprehensive managerial responsibilities such as monitoring, evaluation, capacity building, and promoting greater utilization of community mediation. Key tasks included advocating for funding, coordinating statewide outreach, maintaining the community mediation Resolution MA website<sup>2</sup>, establishing programming, supporting Centers in achieving their SMART goals, ensuring compliance with program requirements, maintaining regular communication with Centers through monthly and semi-annual updates, sponsoring and organizing mediator trainings and learning communities, and addressing various program-related matters.

### 2.3 Budget Advocacy

The CMC Grant Program’s statutory mission to increase utilization of community mediation requires funding support from the state. During FY2024 MOPC exercised its authority to “advocate for funding and resources for the statewide program and for community mediation programming (MGL c.75, §47(b))” by engaging in annual budget advocacy with the legislative and executive branches for state support. MOPC and the Centers requested level funding of \$3.2 million for FY2025 since the CMC Grant Program state appropriation had just been increased by \$500,000 for FY2024.

In support of this request, MOPC met with budget analysts and held a virtual legislative briefing to launch FY2025 budget advocacy. The briefing drew attendees from legislative offices, including legislators and aides. All 12 Center Directors attended, along with Center staff, volunteers and other supporters. The theme was “Access to Justice,” and included presentations by MOPC staff and Center directors focusing on how access to mediation services provides individuals and communities with opportunities for fair and constructive conflict resolution. MOPC and the Centers also collaborated on a video featuring testimonials from mediation parties, partner organizations, and legal professionals, who spoke about the positive impacts of mediation services.

The Governor’s FY2025 budget funded the CMC Grant Program at \$3,013,465 which was a \$300,000 increase from the prior year amount included by the Governor. The House voted to maintain MOPC’s funding at the same level as FY2024 and the Senate voted to reduce the funding by \$200,000. After the reconciliation, the final FY2025 budget allocated \$3,013,465 for the CMC Grant Program and allowed remaining FY2024 funds (\$86,750) to carry over to FY2025.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.resolutionma.org/our-centers>

## **2.4 Reporting and Accountability**

MOPC demonstrated its accountability for the administration of the CMC Grant Program and the impact of the public funding invested in it through accounts of the CMC Grant Program and related statewide program operations and accomplishments in quarterly reports to the Program’s advisory committee comprised of community mediation stakeholders, and through annual program evaluation reports prepared by the MOPC Research Unit filed with specified public officials in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the state government (see MGL c.75, §47 (h)). Program evaluation reports were based on information from surveys, the MADtrac case management database system, various Center reports on their activities under the CMC Grant Program and related programming, and internal MOPC program and financial records. The FY2024 evaluation report was completed in December 2024.

### **2.4.1 Data Collection**

Funded Centers are required by statute to provide information about their budget, services, and other matters to MOPC to fulfill reporting responsibilities (MGL c.75, §47 (h)). Over the years, MOPC has helped Centers generate the necessary data about their operations by conducting a year-end survey and providing access to MADtrac, the database system.

FY2024 marked the fourth year of the multi-year project to develop a new activity manager database system to replace MADtrac. The system is called Resolution Activity Manager (RAM). During FY2024, this initiative advanced from system design and development to User Acceptance Testing (UAT). The Community Mediation Technical Team (CMTT), comprised of MOPC and Center staff members, tested and approved a partial UAT (UAT 01) completed by the developer, Evensel, and began planning for system training and implementation in FY2025. RAM has been custom designed to enhance the tracking of mediation cases handled by Centers across the state, centralizing key processes such as case intake, mediator assignments, outcomes, and participant feedback.

Beyond improving operations, RAM will support research initiatives by offering a robust dataset for analyzing dispute resolution trends and their long-term impact on communities. By enabling data-informed decision-making, the system strengthens collaboration among mediators, stakeholders, and policymakers, fostering more effective and responsive policy outcomes. Throughout FY2024, MOPC staff actively participated in meetings to provide feedback on system features and displays, supporting ongoing refinements. Early in FY2025, MOPC staff received a full introduction to the system, laying the foundation for a planned rollout to Centers later in the year and positioning Massachusetts as a leader in leveraging technology to enhance research, community outcomes, and policy development.

### **2.4.2 Program Advisory Committee (PAC)**

To help MOPC fulfill its administrative responsibilities, MOPC worked with the CMC Grant Program Advisory Committee (PAC), established in accordance with the enabling statute as a sounding board to MOPC for program policymaking and outreach and a vehicle for accountability to stakeholders. MOPC provided written quarterly updates to the PAC and convened Fall and Spring PAC meetings during FY2024 to seek the Committee’s feedback on FY2025-2027 grant-making plans, guidance on supporting Center trainers and training needs, Center staff retention challenges, and discuss Center expansion.

In FY2024, several new members joined the PAC, including a Center Director, a DEI Director from the Trial Court, and an Executive Director from a Massachusetts housing agency. With these additions of new members and renewals by older members, the current PAC hosts a balance of experienced and fresh perspectives across government, court, the university and non-profit organizations.

## **2.5 Grant Program supported Statewide Programs**

MOPC integrated operational support into community mediation programming by establishing statewide programs under the CMC Grant Program, serving two purposes. First, linking operational support to programming raises the potential for acquiring supplementary funding, as funders are more likely to support programs that align with their interests. Programming, rather than operations, is typically the preferred funding objective, even though programming depends on operational support. The operational funding from the CMC Grant Program supports the mission of community mediation in Massachusetts and has attracted financial support from other funders, acting as a vehicle for fundraising.

Second, addressing community needs is a Center standard (see Table 1) and a factor in determining CMC Grant Program awards: “The grants administered under this section shall be used solely to provide operational funding for Centers to assist them in meeting the needs of local communities,” and “[t]he Commonwealth’s share of the operating cost of any Center funded under this section shall include ... [an additional award that may include among other considerations] the extent services are being provided to underserved or unserved areas of the Commonwealth and the Center’s contribution to identified community objectives within the geographical regions served” (MGL c.75, §47(c)). Current CMC Grant Program grantees are addressing the challenges of homelessness, recidivism, youth violence, and systemic injustice faced by Massachusetts communities through the related statewide programs administered by MOPC.

### **2.5.1 Massachusetts Housing Mediation Program (HMP)**

The Housing Mediation Program (HMP), administered by MOPC, utilizes the community mediation system infrastructure, with 11 Centers serving all 14 counties of the Commonwealth. The program, initially launched in FY2021 as part of the Governor’s Eviction Diversion Initiative (EDI), provides free housing mediation services aimed at housing stabilization. While it began focusing on pandemic-related rental arrears, it has since expanded to address any housing disputes that could lead to eviction or housing loss. In FY2024, MOPC launched a pilot with MassHousing within the HMP to leverage existing publicly funded dispute resolution infrastructure.

#### **HMP Funding**

In FY2024, MOPC allocated approximately \$730,000 to the HMP, of which \$575,000 was awarded in grants to 11 Centers at three different funding levels, based on the volume of housing mediation services and staffing needs. These grants allowed Centers to employ one or two staff to conduct outreach, coordinate remote and in-person mediation services, and liaise with HMP partners. An additional \$10,000 was spent on training and \$10,000 on consultation services provided by U413, one of the Centers with significant expertise in housing mediation. The remaining \$135,000 was allocated for program administration and evaluation.

## **HMP Partnerships and Outreach**

In FY2024 MOPC continued working with the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to find opportunities for housing agencies to leverage HMP services. This included delivering a housing mediation presentation for Regional Administering Agency (RAA) staff at an EOHLC-organized RAA Office Hours session and providing updated contact information for housing mediation coordinators. Collaboration with EOHLC's Public Housing Division in FY2023 led to additional outreach opportunities with local housing authorities (LHAs) in FY2024, including the Boston Housing Authority's ECHO program. MOPC also presented to Resident Site Coordinators (RSCs) statewide and the Mass Landlords Association.

## **HMP Administration and Learning Groups**

MOPC and participating Centers continued to identify areas for innovation and streamlining while maintaining quality services. The monthly HMP learning community meetings during FY2024 allowed coordinators to problem-solve, share successes and outreach tips, discuss case management practices, and address survey administration. MOPC also organized special topics for these meetings.

The monthly learning series for HMP mediators in FY2024 focused on housing-related mediation skills, covering topics such as balancing past vs. future focus, durable agreements, mediator bias, the court's influence, and case studies. Additionally, a summary process mediation training for experienced mediators was held in January 2024, with a new screening process to ensure basic mediation skills. Seven mediators from six Centers completed the training, which was also open to Center and MOPC staff for refresher, staff development, and background purposes.

## **HMP Service Delivery**

In FY2024, the HMP received 1,611 referrals, with 1,513 screened, resulting in 1,487 cases. Of these, 462 were mediated in 535 mediation sessions, resulting in the preservation of 355 tenancies and 103 housing subsidies. A total of 1,188 landlords and 1,376 tenants across 14 Massachusetts counties received services. Most services were delivered remotely, with some in-person as communities and agencies reopened. Reflecting the program's impact, one tenant shared, "Thanks to mediation, I've been able to get things under control. I will definitely recommend it to others, this is a wonderful program." This feedback underscores the effectiveness of mediation in stabilizing housing situations and providing tenants and landlords with a constructive path forward.

## **HMP Data Collection and Research**

HMP data collection and reporting to EOHLC and MassHousing is managed by MOPC using MADtrac, the database system deployed by the Centers. Additionally, HMP data is collected from case-related documents, and surveys and interviews of HMP parties. MOPC undertakes the systematic evaluation of implementation and impact data using indicators developed in consultation with EOHLC to measure and verify HMP success and demonstrate the value of public investment in this program. The FY2024 HMP program evaluation report will be published in FY2025.

The HMP evaluation plan was updated in FY2024 with input from EOHLC to reflect the expanded goal of housing stabilization. New instruments are to be deployed in FY2025.

## **HMP-TAP Pilot**

In FY2024, MOPC and MassHousing launched a pilot within the HMP to provide upstream dispute resolution services through MassHousing's longstanding Tenancy Assistance Program (TAP). The goal was to deploy state-sponsored public dispute resolution infrastructure to stabilize tenancies and reduce onsite conflict at housing sites enrolled in TAP. Centers involved in the HMP provided dispute resolution services for TAP-enrolled housing sites, and these services were integrated into the HMP with adjusted policies and procedures. MOPC added staff to monitor case referrals and manage quarterly invoicing for services delivered. TAP mediations addressed a variety of disputes, including noise complaints, police involvement, parking conflicts, threats, discrimination claims, and disputes with management. Additionally, Centers conducted community-building workshops addressing high resident tensions, bullying, and aggressive behavior.

At the end of the year, MOPC analyzed the pilot's outcomes and produced a FY2024 Evaluation Report. During FY2024, Centers received 30 TAP referrals for mediation and six workshop requests. Of the mediation referrals, 29 were screened, and 12 were mediated. Three workshops were delivered with one delivered at the start of FY2025. The evaluation highlighted the effectiveness of mediation in improving resident relationships, reducing conflicts, and preserving tenant occupancies by preventing disputes from escalating to evictions. Mediation clarified miscommunications, ensured all parties felt heard, and equipped residents with skills to manage future disputes. Community-building workshops raised awareness of collaborative conflict resolution methods, promoted peaceful living environments, and provided residents with frameworks and skills to resolve conflicts productively. These findings underscore the pilot's success in fostering stability and collaboration within TAP housing sites.

### **2.5.2 Massachusetts Reentry Mediation Program (ReMAp)**

The Massachusetts Reentry Mediation Program (ReMAp) is administered by MOPC in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC), County Sheriff's Departments, and qualified Centers statewide. ReMAp's vision is to help incarcerated individuals break the cycles of reincarceration and recidivism by strengthening family and social relationships with community-based conflict resolution services. This program aims to provide a statewide, state-sponsored reentry mediation service for individuals pre-release, post-release, and those at risk of incarceration, using existing state-funded conflict resolution infrastructure.

#### **ReMAp Funding**

For FY2024, the Legislature continued the \$200,000 reentry mediation earmark in MOPC's community mediation appropriation. In the second year of a two-year grant cycle, seven Centers received grants of \$20,000 each to cover reentry staff for 10-15 hours a week, plus \$2,500 per mediator mentor, totaling \$162,500 in ReMAp grants. The remaining \$260,000 in program funding covered MOPC reentry staff and expenses, including training costs.

#### **ReMAp Partnerships**

The most significant development of FY2024 was the signing of an MOU with DOC, allowing for the collection of evaluation data and expansion to additional DOC-run facilities. As a result, progress was

made at facilities like MCI-Framingham and the Boston Pre-Release Center, generating referrals and intakes. By FY2024, there were 12 active partnerships covering four DOC-run facilities (MCI-Shirley, MCI-Concord, the NE Correctional Center, and MCI-Framingham) and eight Sheriff-run facilities (Dukes, Essex, Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire, Middlesex, Suffolk, Worcester).

At the end of FY2024, DOC decided to close MCI-Concord, reducing services. The incarcerated population and staff will be relocated to other DOC facilities, and MOPC will collaborate with DOC to ensure continued access to services.

During FY2024, ReMAP focused on building familiarity with the program and establishing referral streams through in-person and Zoom presentations to statewide post-release agencies, including DOC's Pathfinders, the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, and the Trial Court's Community Justice Support Centers. Centers followed up with local outreach to strengthen these connections.

### **ReMAP Mentoring**

In FY2024, the ReMAP mentorship program introduced a continuing education requirement: mentors would complete six hours annually, while other reentry mediators would complete four hours. Mentors continued monthly meetings to debrief cases and discuss challenges, delivered three skill-building workshops, and assisted with two role-play sessions. Over 90% of active mediators attended at least one continuing education event, receiving positive feedback on the sessions, mentors, coaches, and content.

### **ReMAP Learning Groups**

In FY2024, regular ReMAP case coordinator meetings continued, where staff responsible for delivering informational sessions, conducting intakes, and scheduling mediation shared updates, engaged in joint learning, and addressed challenges. A reentry case coordinator training was held in November to onboard new staff, and a five-day training (four in-person and one Zoom day) was attended by seven mediators and MOPC staff. Previously trained mediators also participated for a refresher.

### **ReMAP Service Delivery and Research**

In FY2024, the ReMAP evaluation took on renewed vigor by expanding services post-release to formerly incarcerated individuals. However, challenges to evaluation data collection persisted as data on ReMAP's impact on parties and on recidivism in general was scarce or unavailable.

To address this, MOPC evaluators conducted a literature and scoping review, adding pro-social indicators to measure outcomes that could reduce recidivism over time. This approach aimed to evaluate both pre- and post-release cases, given the scope change and the difficulty in establishing causal links. MOPC updated its data collection instruments to assess mediation's impact on pro-social relationships, streamlining them for clarity and conciseness. These updated instruments were approved by the UMass Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) and will be implemented in FY2025.

Despite these challenges, 22 informational sessions were provided to 286 incarcerated individuals across facilities in FY2024. Additionally, three post-release informational sessions were held for 27 previously incarcerated individuals. From those events, 47 people completed pre-release intakes and six people completed post-release intakes. Those that attended informational sessions were offered evaluation forms. Of those offered, 224 submitted forms and on a scale of 1-10 with anything above six



being counted as satisfactory, 88% found the presentations to be satisfactory. Comments ranged from “They were great” to “The session was perfect.”

Feedback from parties in nine pre-release and two post-release mediations in FY2024 revealed high satisfaction levels. One party encapsulated their experience by stating, “Today was a good day,” while another commented, “This was great and productive.” These responses reflect the overall positive impact of the mediation process in fostering constructive dialogue and promoting mutual understanding. The unanimous agreement on the clarity of the process, the impartiality of the mediators, and the opportunity to freely express concerns suggests that the program is effective in addressing party needs. However, while some reported an improved understanding of each other, satisfaction with the outcomes varied, indicating the complexity of conflict resolution and relationship dynamics.

### **2.5.3 Massachusetts Youth Conflict Resolution and Restorative Practices Program (Youth Program)**

The Youth Conflict Resolution and Restorative Practices Program (Youth Program), administered by MOPC in partnership with qualified Centers across the state, aims to reduce youth violence using a positive youth development approach. This approach empowers youth as assets who contribute to their families, neighborhoods, and communities. The Youth Program funds projects that enhance school climate, community health, safety, and engagement, leveraging the expertise of Centers in schools, neighborhoods, and courts. Through systematic evaluation and partnerships with community sponsors and funders, the program ensures sustainable youth programming across Massachusetts.

#### **Youth Program Grants and Projects**

In FY2024, MOPC renewed grants totaling \$340,000 to support 10 Centers in carrying out their Center-based youth programs, which generated over \$218,000 in matching funds and in-kind donations from community partners. The grants fund one part-time or full-time staff member to develop and implement these youth projects and programs.

*Cape Mediation, Orleans - \$25,000:* Cape Mediation continued to work with Nauset Regional High School to offer peer mediation as well as run workshops on leadership and conflict resolution skills to team captains, student leaders, and clubs. The Center also provided restorative circles and/or workshops using their “Pathways to Peace” curriculum to the Provincetown IB School, Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School, Cape Cod Community College STEM Starter Academy, and the Barnstable County Human Rights Academy.

*Metropolitan Mediation Services, Brookline - \$25,000:* MMS built its efforts to serve Boston Public Schools (BPS), including peer mediator training and workshops provided to Rafael Hernandez School, Lilla G. Frederick Pilot Middle School, and the Boston Public Student Diplomats Program. The Center offered training sessions for staff involved with the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health’s Tele-behavioral Health Program, and for junior counselors at the Philip Brooks House Association. A partnership with the BPS’s Office of Restorative Justice shows promise in expanding efforts across BPS in the future.

*Community Dispute Settlement Center, Cambridge - \$25,000:* CDSC continued to provide peer mediation training and program support at the Acera School and Putnam Ave Upper School and explored new programs with Chelsea High School and Upper Rindge School for FY2025. The Center continued to have a weekly presence in the Cambridge Juvenile Court. They also provided skills training to a variety of organizations, including Next Step and Peabody After School, The Possible Zone, Roca, Cambridge Community Center, and more.

*Martha's Vineyard Mediation Program, Inc., Vineyard Haven - \$30,000:* The Center greatly expanded the reach of its Peace Curriculum to include Edgartown Elementary School 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades; Oak Bluffs Elementary School 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades; Martha's Vineyard Public Charter 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades; and the Chilmark School 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. A student cohort worked with the Center and the local television station to produce a mediation training video. Additional staffing capacity was achieved to further expand programming in the future.

*Metro West Mediation Services, Framingham - \$30,000:* MWMS continued to expand the reach of its peer mediation programs, including ongoing programs and trainings with Advanced Math and Science Academy and Wayland High School, and providing peer mediation trainings to Nashoba Valley Technical Institute and Reading Memorial High School. Significant efforts were made to partner with Framingham Public Schools in FY2025.

*Mediation Services of North Central MA, Inc., Fitchburg - \$35,000:* The Center offered peer mediation trainings through the Spanish American Center, Ayer-Shirley Regional Middle School, and Fitchburg High School. They also presented conflict resolution workshops to Junior Police Academies in Leominster and Fitchburg and began the Center's Youth Ambassadors Program at Gardner Middle School, as well as prepared for beginning programming with Leominster Public School's TRIO program in the year ahead.

*Middlesex Community College Law Center, Lowell - \$35,000:* MCC continued its long-standing work with Lowell Public Schools, including Lowell High School which has been a partner since 1991, as well as the Sullivan Middle School and Butler Middle School. Peer mediation programs are ongoing, restorative circles were held with students and staff, and plans for supporting summer school programs were developed. In addition, the Center offered conflict skills training to mentors through the Wellness Center at Middlesex Community College.

*UpSide413 (formerly Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority's Dispute Resolution Center), Pittsfield - \$45,000:* The Center continued its extensive offerings to the Pittsfield Public School District, including mediation services, restorative justice circles, and conflict coaching. All services are offered in English and/or Spanish. Nearly 200 mediations were held, a significant increase over the prior year. In addition, the Center began partnering with the district on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program to offer conflict resolution skill building opportunities to historically marginalized students.

*The Resolution Center, Beverly - \$45,000:* TRC continued to expand the number of schools they support including Lawrence Catholic Academy, Amesbury High School, and Lawrence High School. In addition to supporting peer mediation programs across the region, the Center

also delivered restorative circle programs at the Waring School, Gloucester Middle School, and Gloucester High School. TRC worked with student leaders in the Student Advisory Group and supported peer mediators across the area through the annual Peer Mediators' Forum.

*Collaborative Resolutions Group, Greenfield - \$45,000:* CRG worked with administrators and students in the Northampton Public School District to address school climate, Social Emotional Learning proficiencies, and revise disciplinary practices, through using restorative practices. The Center continued to build upon its regional networking efforts, providing ongoing learning communities for students, faculty, and staff, as well as conducting regional mapping efforts. In addition, CRG convened partners to collaborate on a Restorative Justice Diversion Program for the Holyoke Juvenile Court.

### **Youth Program Learning Community**

MOPC continued to coordinate during FY2024 a Program Learning Community (PLC) offering Center youth staff forums where progress is shared, challenges are discussed, and new opportunities for youth programming are explored both locally, regionally, and statewide. Feedback from Center youth staff has been overwhelmingly positive, and collaboration among Centers remains strong due to the connections fostered in the PLC.

### **Youth Program Research**

Prior to FY2024, data collection and evaluation methods varied across Center grant-funded youth initiatives, making it difficult to demonstrate the collective impact of the Youth Program and advocate for increased funding. To address this, MOPC evaluators researched effective methods for evaluating peer-based conflict resolution and restorative practices programs and developed surveys to assess students' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills and school climate. These evidence-based models aligned with public policies and funding priorities of the Commonwealth, resulting in more standardized data, which is analyzed in the FY2024 Youth Program Evaluation Report, MOPC's first comprehensive analysis: [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/mopc\\_pubs/41](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/mopc_pubs/41).

The school climate needs assessment revealed that while a small proportion of administrators were satisfied with the overall school climate, the majority highlighted a need for improvement. Many students reported feeling safe, yet a significant number expressed concerns about feeling unsupported, lacking resources for conflict resolution, and perceiving indifference from both peers and adults. Issues of inequity and prevalent conflict were also highlighted, underscoring the potential for the Youth Program to improve school climate across Massachusetts.

The SEL evaluation highlighted that the majority of students demonstrated valuable gains in SEL competencies through the Youth Program's training workshops. Administrators unanimously agreed that the program positively influenced key skills, such as social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. Parents also largely concurred that the Youth program fostered essential social-emotional skills. Additionally, pre- and post-training results showed significant progress in peer mediation skills, including understanding conflict, the peer mediator role, mediation values, the mediation process, and active listening, with increased comfort in handling conflict. One administrator emphasized the Youth Program's long-term value, noting, "These

are lifelong skills that can be applied in both school and life situations,” underscoring the lasting impact of these skills beyond the classroom.

#### **2.5.4 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Grants Initiative (DEI)**

The DEI Initiative was created as a means of accomplishing greater diversity under the Twelve-Point Model and greater equity and inclusion in Centers’ and MOPC’s operations as well as the operations of CMC Grant Program programming.

##### **DEI Grant-funded Projects**

MOPC awarded grants to Centers to initiate DEI organizational assessments as a component of the FY2023-2024 grant application process. In FY2024, MOPC renewed DEI grants totaling \$100,000 to seven Centers for DEI organizational initiatives around long-term changes for dismantling of institutional racism, inequity, and exclusionary practices. While many of the Centers focused on DEI organizational assessments and plan development in FY2023, the focus shifted to implementation in FY2024. Activities centered around several themes, including language accessibility and programmatic flexibility, policy and operational changes to support inclusivity and equity, and sustained knowledge-building of DEI principles and practices.

*Community Dispute Settlement Center - \$10,000:* CDSC continued implementing activities based on the plan developed from their DEI assessment. Such activities included developing written policies to promote transparency, integrating DEI as a standing topic at board meetings, and organizing and facilitating several DEI-focused panel discussions for mediators. CDSC also restructured its mediator apprenticeship program to be more inclusive and supportive, providing scholarships, expanding case types available for apprentices, and setting up clear expectations and responsibilities for mentor mediators and apprentices.

*Collaborative Resolutions Group - \$15,000:* As part of their anti-oppression strategy, CRG fostered continual learning and reflection on anti-oppression and DEI through frequent distribution of reading materials, supported by ongoing dialogues amongst staff. CRG also held a staff retreat to align all staff on core values, including equity in programming and organizational culture and initiate the process of integrating new practices into the workplace culture.

*Middlesex Community College Law Center - \$15,000:* From the DEI organizational assessment that MCC underwent in FY2023, the Center developed a three-year strategic plan with equity at its core. MCC also hired a part-time DEI coordinator to support targeted outreach to communities, identify language gaps in Center materials, and lead the effort to close those gaps. MCC also developed and distributed a survey on conflict to collect insights on how to better serve communities.

*Mediation Services of North Central Massachusetts - \$15,000:* Building on progress made in FY2023 with the new bilingual staff person, MSI broadened its outreach by creating more Spanish-language materials and social media posts, reaching out to the community at different spaces such as daycare facilities and churches, and offering more information sessions in

Spanish. MSI also developed and delivered several Spanish-language conflict resolution workshops. These efforts resulted in an increase in inquiries from Spanish-speaking individuals.

*Martha's Vineyard Mediation Program - \$15,000:* MVMP focused on the Brazilian community in addition to its sustained efforts to integrate DEI + B (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) into organizational culture and practices (examples include: frequent sharing of DEI reading materials and resources, standing DEI topics for staff and board meetings). Through the Community Advisory Board (CAB) that was created in FY2023, MVMP deepened their understanding of community needs to create more inclusive programming. The CAB was also instrumental in launching a new coalition, Building Bridges, that the Center partnered with, to put together an event aimed at fostering inclusivity and connecting the Brazilian community with organizations that provide resources for residents.

*MetroWest Mediation Services - \$15,000:* MWMS leveraged MOPC's DEI grant to secure additional funds that enabled the Center to convert their part-time bilingual staff member to full-time status. This investment in a member of the Brazilian community led to increases in awareness and access of mediation services by members of the Brazilian community. The investment in a full-time staff member resulted in a 50% increase in direct services to Portuguese speakers in FY2024.

*The Resolution Center - \$15,000:* TRC continued its approach of iterative progress through periodic DEI-informed reviews and updates to their strategic plan, operations, and programs. This included an update to the strategic plan as well as changes to hiring practices to increase equity and adoption of more inclusive policies to mediator apprenticeships and trainings. Efforts led to an increase in diversity of TRC's board, a more accessible Basic Mediation Training, and a more flexible mediator apprenticeship program.

### **DEI Learning Community**

MOPC continued holding a monthly DEI learning community with Centers to provide a support system for Center staff to share learnings and accomplishments as well as collectively problem solve challenges. Some of the topics covered in the learning community included how to evaluate DEI organizational progress, gender-neutral language use (presented by MVMP), outreach strategies to Portuguese or Spanish-speaking communities, and barriers to access of community mediation.

### **DEI Grant Impact Evaluation**

To evaluate the impact of the FY2023-2024 DEI grants before launching the FY2025-2027 cycle, MOPC developed a survey targeting the seven Centers that received funding. The survey collected responses from 18 respondents, including staff, board members, and individuals in leadership, management, or volunteer roles.

The findings revealed strong clarity in communicating DEI grant objectives, with most respondents expressing a clear understanding and affirming effective communication of DEI initiatives to stakeholders. The grants led to significant policy changes, including more accessible HR policies,

transparent hiring practices, and improved board recruitment. Many respondents also noted advancements in equitable hiring, promotion practices, and more inclusive decision-making.

Community access to services improved as Centers recruited mediators with diverse language skills, created interpreter resources, and trained mediators from underrepresented groups. The majority of respondents also reported enhanced service quality through better training, culturally appropriate practices, and multilingual support. One noted, “We’ve been able to better train staff and volunteers and provide services in ways community members understand.”

Over half of the respondents attended DEI training, all finding it effective. Topics such as micro-aggressions were particularly praised for their “eye-opening” nature, changing respondents’ approaches to interactions. Additionally, most observed improvements in cultural competence among mediators.

Success stories demonstrated the grants’ impact, including a significant increase in services for Portuguese speakers and increased Spanish-speaking parties and mediators. One respondent applied DEI training to court mediations, helping bridge cultural divides.

Challenges included limited resources, difficulties in educating communities about Center services, recruiting multilingual volunteers, staffing disruptions, and a lack of mentorship for new mediators. Despite these challenges, nearly all respondents rated the DEI grant’s impact as positive.

Recommendations for future efforts included developing youth-friendly marketing, centralizing resources, embedding DEI into all Center operations, expanding local partnerships, and increasing funding for key staff roles.

## **DEI Framework**

During FY2024 MOPC developed a DEI framework, informed by its 2023 DEI Research Report<sup>3</sup>, to guide MOPC and the Centers to achieve the DEI vision of creating a more just and equitable Massachusetts through embedding DEI principles within community mediation. The framework lays out the DEI vision and mission, strategic objectives, grantmaking strategies, program design for the DEI Capacity Building Program with goals and metrics for evaluation, to be launched in FY2025.

## **3 Grant Program Impact on Funded Centers**

### **3.1 Funded Centers**

In FY2024, through the CMC Grant Program, 12 Community Mediation Centers received state-funded grants (see Table 2). Centers were community-based grassroots organizations, which were either independent non-profits (eight) or components of a non-profit or public agency parent organization (four) (see Table 4).

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<sup>3</sup> [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/mopc\\_pubs/35/](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/mopc_pubs/35/)

**Table 4. FY2024 Funded Centers, Center Status and the Counties Served by Center**

Funded Community Mediation Centers	Center Status	Counties Served
Cape Cod Dispute Resolution Center ( <b>Cape Mediation</b> ) in Orleans	Independent non-profit	Barnstable*, Nantucket
Collaborative Resolutions Group ( <b>CRG</b> ) in Greenfield	Independent non-profit	Franklin*, Hampden, Hampshire
Community Dispute Settlement Center ( <b>CDSC</b> ) in Cambridge	Independent non-profit	Middlesex*, Norfolk, Suffolk
Family Services of Central Massachusetts Mediation Program ( <b>FSCM</b> ) in Worcester	Parent organization: Family Services of Central MA and affiliated with the Seven Hills Foundation	Worcester*
Greater Brockton Center for Dispute Resolution ( <b>GBCDR</b> ) in Brockton	Independent non-profit	Plymouth*
Martha’s Vineyard Mediation Program ( <b>MVMP</b> ) in Vineyard Haven	Independent non-profit	Dukes*, Bristol
Mediation Services of North Central MA ( <b>MSI</b> ) in Leominster	Independent non-profit	Worcester*
Metropolitan Mediation Services ( <b>MMS</b> ) in Brookline	Parent organization: Brookline Community Mental Health Center	Suffolk*, Middlesex, Norfolk
MetroWest Mediation Services ( <b>MWMS</b> ) in Natick	Independent non-profit	Middlesex*
Middlesex Community College Law Center ( <b>MCC</b> ) in Lowell	Parent organization: Middlesex Community College	Middlesex*, Essex, Suffolk
The Resolution Center ( <b>TRC</b> ) in Beverly	Independent non-profit	Essex*

UpSide413 (U413) (formerly BCRHA) in Pittsfield	Parent organization: Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority	Berkshire*
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*\*Primary region served by the Center*

### 3.2 Sustainability of Center Operations

In the annual survey responses, the 12 state-funded Centers unanimously recognized the positive impact of the CMC Grant Program on their organizational sustainability.<sup>4</sup> For example, one Center attributed its ability to hire and retain full-time staff directly to the CMC Grant Program’s funding. Another Center noted that the Program has facilitated the diversification of its mediator pool while strengthening existing partnerships and fostering new community relationships. One Center emphasized that the funding that has allowed them to “maintain and expand our services,” ensured a steady flow of resources that reduces reliance on sporadic funding, and enabled investment in staff development to retain a well-trained, experienced team. Many other Centers reported similar outcomes, including program expansion, enhanced financial stability, solidified organizational structures, and deeper partnerships. As one Center summarized: “The CMC Grant Program provides predictable, stable funding on which we can base medium- and long-term programming and staffing decisions. Because of the core funding, we are able to sustain key cross-program expertise in case management, data entry, volunteer management, training, and organizational management. We are also able to bring in complementary funding from a diverse range of sources.” This feedback underscores the significant role of CMC Grant Program funding in enhancing Center sustainability, enabling them to offer accessible services to communities, recruit and train community members, and provide essential education and resources.

Centers’ budget numbers speak to the importance of the CMC Grant Program for Center viability. The \$2,542,100 in CMC Grant Program grants received by the Centers was the source of more than 50% of income for seven out of 12 Centers in FY2024. The collective income revenue for all 12 Centers was \$4,817,373. In contrast, monetary contributions from non-MOPC sources (state, local government, donations, fundraising, Attorney General’s Office - AGO, etc.) amounted to \$2,199,813 in FY2024. The contributions from other major single sources of funding to Centers fluctuated in FY2024. For example, Trial Court funding slightly decreased to \$522,000 (from \$543,500 in FY2023) while AGO grants slightly increased to \$417,800 in FY2024 compared to \$415,800 in FY2023. In terms of fundraising, 10 out of 12 Centers (83%) reported stable fundraising efforts, with two Centers noting an increase.

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<sup>4</sup> MOPC has defined sustainability as the ability to thrive and provide conflict resolution services over the long haul, due to factors such as financial stability, a robust organizational structure, experienced stable staff, adaptable programs, strong partnerships, and more.



### 3.2.1 Center Staffing

Based on their grant applications, collective responses to the annual survey and MADtrac data,<sup>5</sup> many Centers operated with more staffing in FY2024 than in FY2023. More specifically, of the 12 Centers, four recorded an increase in staffing while six reported stable staffing levels, representing 83% in total. For example, MCC hired a full-time DEI/Outreach Coordinator to enhance community engagement and CRG promoted an existing staff member to Mediation Program Manager after a two-year vacancy in the role leading mediator development and supervision. Of the remaining Centers, two reported slight decreases in staffing. For instance, MVMP's newly hired Executive Director left after two months, leaving the Center without a successor following a lengthy search. MVMP then created and filled an Assistant Director position internally to address this gap.

Leadership transitions further shaped the staffing landscape, as three Centers appointed new Directors. While these transitions posed challenges, they also created opportunities for Centers to re-evaluate practices, improve cross-functional collaboration, and adapt. Existing staff temporarily covered vacancies and, in some cases, assumed new roles. Additionally, Centers continued sharing personnel, with staff temporarily taking on part-time roles at other Centers to support colleagues during hiring transitions and sharing promising job candidates to address staffing needs. Overall, 10 out of 12 Centers (83%) experienced staff transitions, and 11 Centers (92%) onboarded new staff, interns, or fellows.

Staff hours also saw notable changes. Four Centers reported an increase in staff hours, while seven, representing 92% of Centers, indicated stability in staff hours. For example, MMS increased the hours of one of their staff members and a senior supervising mediator to invest in their supervising model and explore ways to support their volunteers in the future.

This increase in staffing may be attributed to the use of CMC Grant Program grants to strengthen employee infrastructure. During FY2024, the 12 Centers employed 32 full-time and 33 part-time staff, averaging three full-time and three part-time staff per Center, with additional support from 523 volunteers (mediators and administrative volunteers). Despite these gains, Centers continued to identify key staffing needs. The three most important needs across all 12 Centers were additional funds for increasing existing staff salaries (83%), salary benefits for staff (58%), and professional development for staff and mediators (83%). While five Centers reported growth in professional development opportunities, seven maintained stability in this area. These findings reveal that although many Centers experienced increases in staffing and hours during FY2024, there remains a critical need for improved staff retention through enhanced benefits and professional development.

### 3.2.2 Center Mediators

In FY2024, five Centers reported an increase in active volunteer mediators due to training and outreach efforts. For example, GBCDR conducted a 30-hour remote Basic Mediation Training, training 10 individuals, two of whom have applied to volunteer as mediators. MVMP offered five Introduction to Mediation Courses, attracting 45 participants and adding seven qualified mediators and 12 apprentice

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<sup>5</sup> Centers' Grant Application Requests (GARs) for FYs 2025-2027 reported on FY2024 activities. As part of the GAR, Centers provided MADtrac data reports for FY2024. Centers completed the annual end-of-year survey by October 2024.

mediators to their roster. Similarly, MMS gained seven new volunteer mediators through its Basic Mediation Training, while MWMS recruited eight.

All Centers conducted mediation trainings to maintain service quality and recruit new mediators. According to MADtrac data, 3,407 participants engaged in 374 training sessions focused on mediation skills. These included 243 individuals in Basic Mediation Training, 1,094 in advanced mediation training, 1,345 in specialized training, and 725 in peer mediation training. These trainings, alongside outreach efforts, were crucial in expanding the pool of mediators.

Outreach efforts also played a critical role in volunteer recruitment. MSI used online platforms like VolunteerMatch.org and JoinHandshake.com to post opportunities, boosting enrollment in their Basic Mediation Training. Additionally, participation in a United Way board recruitment event led to the addition of a Portuguese-speaking volunteer. CCDRC connected with potential volunteers and board members through the Cape Cod Young Professionals and the Barnstable County Bar Association. MWMS staff conducted outreach at Brandeis University, securing two interns and one AmeriCorps member. Furthermore, CDSC's Executive Director expanded outreach by teaching a course at Harvard Law School, participating in panels, and being featured in *Harvard Law Today*, all of which attracted potential volunteers.

While the total number of volunteer mediators across the 12 Centers decreased from 501 in FY2023 to 400 in FY2024, five Centers saw an increase in active volunteer mediators, six maintained consistent levels, and one experienced a decline. Overall, the number of active mediators increased from 207 in FY2023 to 226 in FY2024. Notable contributions included TRC and CDSC reporting 135 and 56 mediators, respectively. Collectively, volunteer mediators contributed 3,867 mediation hours.

Professional mediator support also showed improvement, with five Centers reporting increased opportunities, six reporting stability, and one experiencing a decline. Additionally, 12 Centers engaged five consultants in FY2024, compared to seven consultants in FY2023. DEI representation improved, with five Centers reporting increased diversity within their mediator rosters. Finally, the number of Centers identifying mediator recruitment and retention as a pressing need decreased from seven in FY2023 to four in FY2024, reflecting progress in addressing these challenges.

### **3.3 Mediator Excellence**

#### **3.3.1 Mediator Development**

In FY2024, Centers remained committed to building a skilled volunteer mediator workforce essential for delivering high-quality dispute resolution services. A majority of Centers reported key activities designed to sustain and enhance mediator expertise: 92% implemented or maintained mentorship and apprenticeship programs, 83% provided continuing education opportunities, 83% engaged in formal evaluations, 75% recognized the contributions of volunteer mediators through formal appreciation programs, and 67% enhanced program administration, focusing on streamlined operations for managing mediator resources. To further ensure high performance, 58% of Centers engaged in performance-based assessments, while another 58% expanded supervision practices to support mediators' growth and

accountability. Half of the Centers also invested in advanced mediation training opportunities and bolstered their recruitment efforts to expand their pool of qualified mediators.

Several Centers provided unique, illustrative examples of their commitment to mediator development. For instance, MCC's Mentorship Program paired less experienced mediators with seasoned practitioners, enhancing the onboarding experience and ensuring robust skill-building. Alongside mentorship, CCDRC offered advanced mediation skills training sessions, where new mediators practiced under the guidance of an experienced mediator and case coordinator, further refining their competencies. Centers also broadened their educational outreach, with MWMS offering free continuing education workshops, such as sessions on mindfulness in mediation, promoting holistic professional development. Evaluation approaches varied, as GBCDR conducted annual individual reviews for each mediator, while U413 used a mediation skills checklist in its formal written assessments. Social gatherings and structured group discussions were also common, with MMS hosting volunteer roundtable sessions that brought together mediators of all experience levels for networking and educational exchanges. Meanwhile, MVMP dedicated 40 hours to advanced mediator training through weekly check-ins, ensuring consistent professional support. In addition to skills-based programs, some Centers focused on fostering community and ongoing learning. For example, Centers, like CRG, held regular debriefing opportunities, including brown bag lunches, monthly roundtables, and quarterly mediator debriefs. Other Centers, like MSI, organized quarterly book clubs aimed at enhancing professional growth through discussions on relevant literature. Overall, these efforts underscore the Centers' commitment to developing a robust and responsive mediator workforce, ensuring that community dispute resolution needs are met with quality and expertise.

### **3.3.2 Learning Communities/Communities of Practice**

Surveyed Centers reported positive experiences with MOPC's learning communities and/or communities of practice, which promoted cross-Center collaboration, resource sharing, and professional growth. Many Centers described communities such as Youth, Case Coordination, DEI, and Housing as "helpful" and "invaluable" for promoting best practices. Participation in these communities led several Centers to modify practices based on shared insights, such as one Center adapting its Youth Program with strategies from the Youth Learning Community to address low referral rates, engage school administrations, and present effectively to schools. Overall, Centers credited these MOPC learning communities with enhancing collaboration, expanding networking opportunities, and suggested tailoring topics to specific Center needs to further improve the sessions.

### **3.3.3 Trainer Development**

A key capacity-building initiative in FY2024 was the Trainer Development Project (TDP), sponsored by MOPC and led by experienced mediator and trainer Daniel Kos from New York's state-supported community mediation system. This yearlong program to develop the skills of Center staff who serve as trainers combined training, coaching, and professional development, with participants identifying specific skills they wanted to develop and receiving targeted coaching based on their goals. The TDP was open to 24 participants, allowing for two participants per Center. Ultimately, 15 participants from

six Centers, including two Center Directors, joined, along with MOPC's Program Manager for the CMC Grant Program.

Participants' goals ranged from improving training presentation skills to redesigning training programs. The TDP began in fall FY2024 with a two-day in-person introduction train-the-trainer session, the first statewide gathering of Center staff since before the pandemic. This training provided high-quality content, fostered a shared knowledge base, and offered participants the opportunity to reconnect and build camaraderie. Center staff subsequently participated in one-on-one coaching sessions, through early FY2025.

### **3.4 Diversity Among Center Mediators**

The assessment of mediator diversity at Centers considered two primary metrics, reflecting their commitment to inclusivity and alignment with the communities they serve. First, MADtrac data on 382 mediators enabled a comparison of the diversity of all Center mediators with that of Massachusetts's overall population, given that Centers collectively serve the entire state. The data showed that the diversity of Center mediators generally mirrored the state's racial, ethnic and gender composition, with representation across females, males, and various racial/ethnic groups, including Asians, African Americans/Blacks, Hispanics/Latinos, Whites, and multi-racial individuals.

However, there was a predominance of female and White mediators, suggesting opportunities for further diversification. Among those who self-identified (276 out of 382), females significantly outnumbered males as mediators (189 or 68% vs. 87 or 32%), a greater disparity than in the Massachusetts population (51% female). Additionally, among those who self-identified (251 out of 382), 165 mediators identified as White (66%), a slightly lower proportion than the 72.7% observed in the state population. Conversely the representation of Hispanic/Latino (25), African American/Black (32), and Asian (18) mediators remained lower than their respective proportions in the broader state population.

The second metric evaluated the diversity of individual mediator pools relative to the demographics of their respective communities, aligning with the Twelve-Point Model community mediation standard, which underscores the importance of local demographic representation. While not all Centers achieved racial/ethnic diversity matching their communities, survey data highlighted encouraging progress: five Centers reported an increase in mediator diversity in FY2024, while six reported stable diversity levels (92% in total). This increased diversity has the potential to enhance the quality and accessibility of mediation services, as mediators with diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds bring valuable perspectives and cultural understanding to conflict resolution.

Specific examples illustrate the impact of these efforts on communities. MSI added six new bilingual/multilingual volunteer mediators who immigrated to the U.S., primarily younger and from BIPOC backgrounds, increasing cultural sensitivity and improving communication with underserved immigrant communities. Similarly, GBCDR conducted a 30-hour Basic Mediation Training with 50% of participants being women of color, two of whom applied to volunteer after training. These new mediators enriched the Center's capacity to address the unique needs of their communities, especially for women and BIPOC populations. MCC's recruitment of four new mediators with varied backgrounds and life experiences further expanded their ability to provide culturally relevant services. U413's 35-hour

Basic Mediation Training engaged participants from historically underrepresented groups, one of whom was accepted into their practicum, representing a step toward long-term inclusion of diverse mediators in their roster. MMS provided scholarships for bilingual participants speaking Spanish and Haitian Creole, ensuring that mediation services were linguistically accessible to non-English-speaking residents, particularly from those immigrant communities. These initiatives helped bridge communication gaps, build trust, and ensure that mediation processes were inclusive and reflective of the community's cultural diversity.

### **3.5 Center Services**

Nearly all Centers (11 out of 12, or 92%) used CMC Grant Program funding to expand or stabilize the number of accessible mediation locations, scheduling hours, and flexible options, further enhancing access to services.

#### **3.5.1 Hybrid Services**

In FY2024, Centers effectively balanced virtual and in-person mediation services, enabling them to address diverse community needs and preferences while boosting service utilization. Several Centers reported an uptick in in-person mediation compared to FY2023, reflecting a gradual return to traditional engagement as pandemic restrictions eased. For instance, CCDRC observed an increase in in-person services as they “returned to in-person services in one of the courts we serve” and saw a rise in requests for mediations involving “small businesses and organizations and upstream housing cases.” These in-person interactions provided opportunities for deeper engagement and enhanced trust-building, particularly in complex or emotionally charged disputes. Nonetheless, CCDRC continued to provide remote services in all district courts, ensuring accessibility for parties who preferred or required virtual mediation.

Similarly, MSI noted that the resumption of in-person court services allowed them to “do more screening in advance of the court call,” which led to “more people opting into mediation.” This proactive approach not only improved participation rates but also streamlined service delivery, showcasing the benefits of hybrid methods. MVMP reported a 10% increase in in-person services in FY2024 over FY2023, further highlighting the growing preference for face-to-face engagement among parties and mediators alike.

At the same time, the value of remote mediation persisted as an essential tool for increasing accessibility, particularly for individuals with transportation, scheduling, or mobility challenges. U413, for example, noted that while remote mediation cases decreased from 24% in FY2023 to 18% in FY2024, they continued to promote virtual options because “the option for remote helps increase access.” Similarly, TRC saw remote cases decline from 37% in FY2023 to 27% in FY2024, attributing this shift to “parties’, partners’ and mediators’ preferences for in-person vs. remote mediations,” shaped by factors such as technology comfort, conflict level, and scheduling convenience. Despite this overall decline, the continued use of remote mediation enabled Centers to serve parties who might otherwise have faced barriers to accessing services.

Collectively, 38% of mediations in FY2024 were conducted remotely, down from 54% in FY2023 and 68% in FY2022, illustrating the growing trend toward in-person engagement. However, MSI emphasized that many parties still opted for virtual mediation, underscoring its enduring importance.

By maintaining a balance of virtual and in-person options, Centers created a party-centered approach that empowered individuals and communities to resolve conflicts in ways that aligned with their circumstances and preferences. This adaptability demonstrates a commitment to meeting evolving needs while ensuring equitable access to mediation, with the potential to enhance trust in mediation services and expand its reach.

### **3.5.2 Economic Accessibility**

Economic accessibility remained a priority for Centers, with most cases (3,386 of 4,530 active and newly opened cases) offered free of charge. Four Centers utilized sliding scale fees in 191 cases, adjusting costs to accommodate financial need. Support from the CMC Grant Program enabled nine out of 12 (75%) Centers to maintain sliding scale options and two Centers to increase their use of sliding scale fees. This commitment to removing financial barriers is further reflected in the wide range of free services provided by the Centers.

MSI offered free bilingual mediation training, conflict coaching/mediation day opportunities, apprenticeships, and mental health training to ensure equitable access and build volunteer capacity. MVMP extended free professional development to teachers through conflict resolution courses, supporting educators in fostering harmonious school environments. MWMS provided six hours of free continuing education annually, along with events on topics like mindfulness and non-violent communication, enhancing the skills of mediators. TRC delivered free community workshops on conflict management, reaching over 40 participants with practical tools for navigating disputes. U413 focused outreach efforts on historically underrepresented groups, promoting free training opportunities to expand access.

Centers also leveraged partnerships to broaden their reach. CDSC ensured all services remained either free or on a sliding scale, maintaining accessibility. FSCM distributed bilingual mediation brochures to court service centers, increasing awareness of no-cost options for small claims and family cases. GBCDR collaborated with adult education centers to connect parties with free mediation services. MCC offered free summer conflict resolution programming to youth and partners, while MMS provided free or sliding-scale workshops tailored to underserved populations, including incarcerated individuals and seniors.

Together, these initiatives underscore the Centers' dedication to economic accessibility, ensuring that mediation services remain within reach of all communities while fostering equity and inclusion.

## **4 Grant Program Impact on Communities**

Community Mediation Centers funded through the CMC Grant Program benefit Massachusetts communities by providing accessible services that address diverse needs. These services help individuals resolve disputes, promote inclusivity, and strengthen social connections, fostering harmony

and equity across the state. Through tailored outreach, training, and programming, Centers empower communities to navigate challenges and build lasting resilience.

## **4.1 Community Empowerment**

### **4.1.1 Awareness and Access through Outreach and Education**

In FY2024, Centers utilized both remote activities and in-person events to enhance outreach and promote community mediation, significantly influencing the communities they served. Their efforts encompassed educational initiatives, distribution of informational materials, and various trainings, which collectively expanded awareness and access to mediation.

For example, FSCM staff distributed physical and electronic brochures in English and Spanish to over 150 local businesses and nonprofits across Worcester County, ensuring that Spanish speaking populations had access to information on services. They also set up a table at the Western New England University of Law Career Day, connecting with future legal professionals, and participated in several fundraising events, highlighting their tailored approach to engaging different sectors. Similarly, U413 attended events such as the Essential Needs Resource Fair, the Latino Festival, and the Multilingual Information Forum; engaged in a radio show; and conducted mailings to Berkshire farm stands and local farmer's markets to promote the Agricultural Mediation Program. These efforts strengthened relationships with community groups, ensuring targeted outreach to underserved populations such as agricultural workers.

Additionally, GBCDR collaborated with the Brockton Garden Club and Adult Learning Center to share their contact information, brochures and literature and delivered a presentation at the Veteran's Center outlining their dispute resolution services and benefits for veterans. This partnership not only raised awareness but also resulted in the Veteran's Center providing the Center with a conference room for mediations involving veterans, a concrete example of how outreach efforts can lead to meaningful community support. Another Center, MVMP, engaged in activities like an island-wide event celebrating the Brazilian community, distributed their monthly Conflict Resolution Newsletter, participated in multiple radio interviews, and joined Brazukada, a Facebook group with over 12.3k members from the Brazilian and Portuguese-speaking community. These culturally sensitive efforts fostered inclusivity, ensuring that immigrant communities felt supported in accessing mediation services. MWMS staff also tabled at Senator Spilka's Health and Wellness Fair, leading to a significant number of referrals for housing and community/neighbor mediation. Furthermore, they reached out to 18 local libraries and set up tables at nine of them to connect with patrons and raise awareness of mediation services, resulting in inquiries about their offerings and interest in training. By engaging community members in familiar and accessible spaces, Centers built trust and connected individuals with resources tailored to their needs.

### **4.1.2 Skill-Building Through Training and Workshops**

A total of 498 trainings—including basic, advanced, specialized, peer mediation, and conflict resolution workshops—were conducted across the 12 Centers, reflecting a commitment to enhancing community capacity for conflict resolution. For instance, CCDRC provided two Basic Mediation Trainings for community members and, through a new partnership with the Nauset Adult and Community Education

Program, delivered conflict management workshops directly to community residents, empowering them to manage disputes constructively. Similarly, CDSC trained a law student and staff member from the New England School of Law and a graduate student from Harvard Divinity School via their Basic Mediation Training. They also offered training scholarships and pro bono Conflict Skills Workshops to groups like the Cambridge Nonprofit Coalition, ensuring that financial barriers did not prevent access to these valuable skills. FSCM conducted two Basic Mediation Trainings: one for 24 Massachusetts Board of Health Hearing Officers and another for four diverse community participants, demonstrating inclusivity. Furthermore, TRC trained peer mediators at schools such as Amesbury High School and provided Conflict Resolution workshops for residential advisors at universities, contributing to healthier campus environments. MVMP offered an Advanced Family Mediation Course for 13 participants, and MWMS provided conflict resolution workshops for residential advisors at Harvard University, Salem State University, and Merrimack College, as well as camp counselors, highlighting the breadth of audiences served.

Overall, all 12 Centers provided trainings, maintained a social media presence, and operated websites, ensuring a broad and sustained impact. Nearly all Centers distributed literature (e.g., brochures, fliers) and produced newsletters, while most participated in workshops, presentations, and conferences. These efforts demonstrated a strategic use of both traditional and digital media to reach diverse audiences. An estimated 5,018 people participated in these trainings, acquiring skills that not only addressed immediate disputes but also fostered long-term cultural shifts toward collaborative problem-solving. Centers' outreach and educational activities, which included fundraising, newsletters, social media engagement, conferences, and website content, reached 407,499 people, while 274,422 people received outreach materials from four Centers. In total, approximately 681,921 people were informed about community mediation and Center services through these efforts in FY2024.

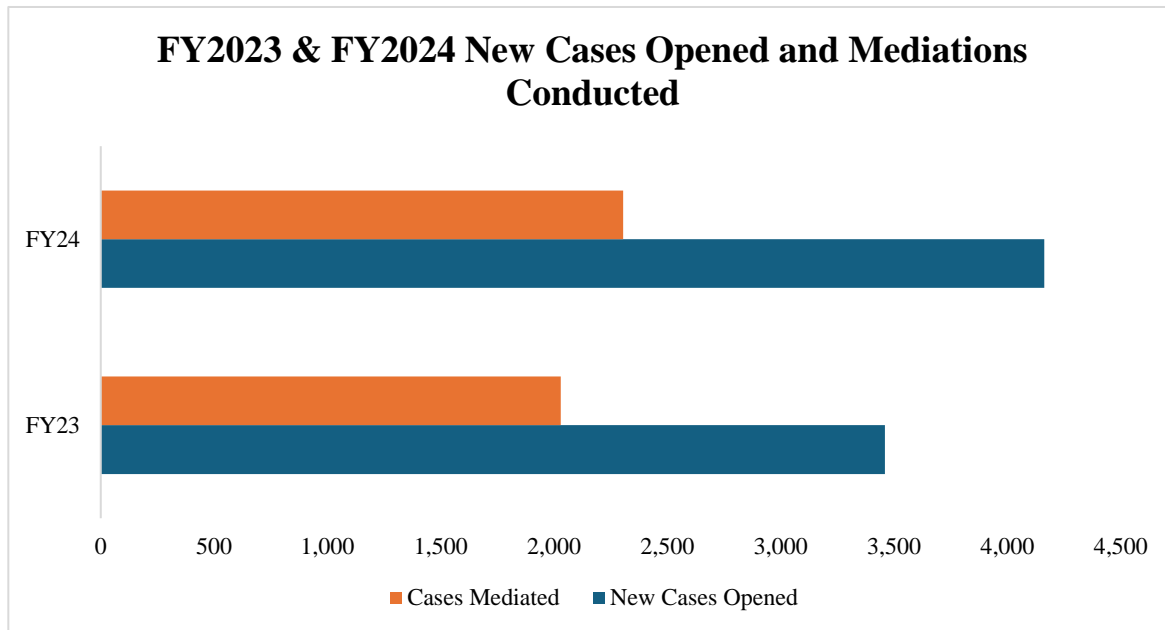
## **4.2 Meeting Community Needs**

### **4.2.1 Growth in Utilization**

The number of new community mediation cases opened rose significantly from 3,460 in FY2023 to 4,163 in FY2024, while cases mediated increased from 2,029 to 2,305. This upward trend, illustrated in the figure below, underscores a recovery from COVID-19 disruptions and demonstrates the growing trust and reliance on mediation as a vital conflict resolution tool. This increase in mediated cases expanded access to timely and cost-effective dispute resolution services, enabling individuals and communities to address conflicts more efficiently and equitably.



**Figure 1. FY2023 and FY2024 New Cases Opened and Mediations Conducted by Year**



### 4.2.2 Range of Disputes Addressed

The CMC Grant Program significantly enhanced the capacity of Centers to handle a diverse array of disputes, addressing the unique challenges faced by Massachusetts communities. In FY2024, seven Centers expanded their services to a broader range of community disputes, while four maintained their existing offerings. Cases spanned 10 categories, including business, family, government, housing, interpersonal, neighborhood, school, workplace, juvenile, and reentry disputes. Notably, in FY2024 there were 1,549 business cases, 1,246 housing cases, 458 school cases, 351 family cases, 114 interpersonal cases, and 91 juvenile/youth cases, among others.

For example, CDSC’s partnership with the Cambridge Police Department (CPD) led to CPD officers receiving facilitation services and mediation training, fostering stronger community-police relations and equipping officers to navigate conflicts more effectively. Similarly, CCDRC recruited two new volunteers with expertise in neighborhood mediation, helping resolve localized disputes and strengthening trust among neighbors. By addressing such a wide range of disputes, Centers provided individuals, families, and institutions with tools to resolve conflicts constructively, reducing tension and promoting harmony within their communities.

### 4.2.3 Diversification of Services Offered

Mediation, whereby disputants discuss their issues and explore ways to achieve a mutually acceptable resolution to their dispute with the assistance of a trained neutral person,<sup>6</sup> was the primary dispute resolution service offered by Centers. When appropriate, Centers also provided disputants with

<sup>6</sup> Supreme Judicial Court Rule 1:18: Uniform Rules on Dispute Resolution. <https://www.mass.gov/supreme-judicial-court-rules/uniform-dispute-resolution-rule-2-definitions>

alternative methods of resolving issues that, like mediation, were discourse-based and non-adversarial, such as conflict coaching, peer mediation, and restorative practices. These innovative services addressed specific community needs, empowering individuals and fostering a culture of resolution and understanding.

Conflict coaching is a one-on-one process in which a dispute resolution specialist, such as a mediator, helps a participant improve his or her conflict management skills.<sup>7</sup> This service is particularly useful when one side in a dispute is interested in dispute resolution assistance and the other is not. For example, MVMP conducted two conflict coaching courses for 14 participants, and CDSC provided six conflict coaching sessions to disputants, enhancing their conflict resolution skills. MSI's free conflict coaching/mediation day opportunities further underscored the Program's accessibility and flexibility, particularly for individuals facing barriers to traditional mediation services.

Peer mediation is a structured process wherein students trained as peer mediators facilitate the resolution of disputes among their peers, helping to identify issues and negotiate solutions in a neutral, supportive environment. The goal of peer mediation is to empower students to handle conflicts constructively, reducing school disruptions and promoting social skills like empathy, communication, and problem-solving.<sup>8</sup> This form of mediation, included among the youth-oriented projects run by Centers with funding under the Youth Program, is typically but not exclusively used in school settings. In FY2024, MWMS partnered with Reading High School and Nashoba Valley Technical High School to conduct 20-hour peer mediation training sessions, while also training 13 students at Dover-Sherborn High School. As a result, one of the peer mediators expressed an interest in interning with MWMS in Summer 2024. Similarly, TRC trained a cohort of peer mediators at Lawrence Catholic Academy, resulting in the launch of a new peer mediation program. Additionally, MMS provided peer mediation training in Boston Public Schools. These programs not only reduced school disruptions but also fostered leadership, empathy, and communication skills, creating a ripple effect of positive change within school communities.

Restorative practices, rooted in the principle of remedying harm, has evolved into various structured personal interactions that aim to promote prosocial conduct among participants.<sup>9</sup> This form of conflict resolution was delivered by Centers for some of the Youth Program grant-funded projects under the CMC Grant Program. For example, TRC partnered with Gloucester schools to conduct four restorative practices workshops for school leaders. Additionally, TRC provided restorative circle training for 36 students and 17 teachers at the Waring School. Similarly, U413 facilitated 25 restorative justice circles, benefiting 188 English-speaking and 93 Spanish-speaking students. Meanwhile, CRG formed a partnership with the Northampton Department of Health and Human Services Youth Coalition Coordinator and Northampton Public Schools to implement restorative practices across all six schools in the district. The Coordinator supported high school members of Youth for Equity and Action in engaging

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.themediationgroup.org/conflict-coaching>

<sup>8</sup> Haburajová Ilavská, L., et al. (2022). Peer mediation as a means of eliminating conflict in the school environment. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 13(2), 285-296.

<sup>9</sup> Eisenkraft, K. O. (2021, February). *Restorative justice: History and evidence of effectiveness*. Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration, University of Massachusetts Boston.

photo-voice projects, Youth Participatory Action Research, and facilitating multigenerational circles throughout the school year. These practices helped repair relationships, supported students in taking responsibility for their actions, and built stronger, more inclusive communities.

#### 4.2.4 Range of Referrals Received

Community Mediation Centers funded through the CMC Grant Program handled disputes referred from numerous courts and a range of community-based sources.

Table 5 illustrates the extensive involvement of Centers across Massachusetts Trial Court divisions, highlighting their statewide reach and impact as court-approved alternative dispute resolution (ADR) providers.

**Table 5. Numbers for MA Trial Court Departments and Divisions served by Centers Funded through the CMC Grant Program in FY2024<sup>10</sup>**

Court Departments	Total Number of Divisions	Number of Divisions that CMC grantees serve	Number of CMC grantees involved with Divisions
Boston Municipal Court	8	8	2
District Court	61	41	12
Juvenile Court	11	10	10
Probate and Family Court	14	11	8
Superior Court	14	13	4
Land Court	1	1	1
Housing Court	6	6	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>n/a</b>

Table 5 highlights the extensive reach of Centers, with 78% of Massachusetts Trial Court divisions (90 out of 115) involving their services. District Courts show the highest engagement, with 41 out of 61 divisions connected to funded Centers, reflecting the broad need for mediation in civil and criminal

<sup>10</sup> Based on court approved programs list for 2022-2024. <https://www.mass.gov/lists/approved-alternative-dispute-resolution-programs>.

cases. Juvenile Courts (10 of 11 divisions) and Probate and Family Courts (11 of 14 divisions) also have strong involvement, underscoring Centers' focus on sensitive disputes involving youth and families. Superior Courts (13 of 14) and Housing Courts (6 of 6) show moderate engagement, while Land Court, with its single division, is fully connected. These findings highlight the critical role Centers play in providing accessible mediation services across diverse Trial Court departments statewide.

In FY2024, the gradual expansion of courts accepting remote ADR services led to a total of 1,930 referrals (46%) to community mediation, marking a modest increase compared to FY2023. Of significance is that in FY2024 Centers received the majority of referrals - 2,273 referrals (54%) - from the community. These community referrals come from a variety of sources, including correctional facilities (e.g., Franklin County Jail), schools (e.g., Lowell High School), housing agencies (e.g., Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance), local non-profits (e.g., Commonwealth Care Alliance), local government (e.g., City of Brockton), and more. For instance, GBCDR received 10 community referrals that resulted in mediation, accounting for approximately 9.5% of their total mediated cases.

### **4.3 Diversity in the Population Served**

According to surveyed Centers, CMC Grant Program grants enabled six Centers to enhance their service delivery to a more diverse range of populations. For instance, MWMS hired a Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking staff member, allowing them to provide direct services to Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking parties without the need for interpreters. Another Center, MSI, increased language representation by hiring a Spanish-speaking staff member and onboarding six bilingual/multilingual volunteers, including a Portuguese speaker who assists with intake calls, translations of informational materials, and outreach to the Brazilian community. Additionally, MSI translated HMP and Youth Program information into Haitian-Creole while MVMP translated their website, newsletters, and brochures into Portuguese to better connect with the growing Brazilian community on the Island.

This effort to increase accessibility is reflected in the diversity of the parties served by the Centers. In FY2024, Centers mediated 2,305 cases. Assuming a minimum of two parties per case and considering the total of 4,490 pending and newly opened cases, the number of parties served in FY2024 is likely higher than the numbers reported. Of the 7,002 served parties, 2,814 provided information about their race/ethnicity. Among these, 1,491 identified as White (up from 1,090 in FY2023) while 1,310 identified as non-White (up from 929 in FY2023), reflecting a slight increase in diversity. The racial/ethnic breakdown of those who self-identified includes 1,491 White, 462 Hispanic or Latino, 538 Black or African American, 138 Asian, 16 American Indian/Alaskan Native, and five Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander, with 94 identifying as "Other" and 55 as "Multi Racial." However, the low response rate regarding racial/ethnic identity limits the ability to accurately assess the overall diversity of the FY2024 population served. At most, party responses indicated that all the major racial/ethnic groups of the Massachusetts population were represented.

In addition to expanding diversity, six Centers reported an increase in services to low-income or underserved populations, while another six indicated no change. This increase may reflect a growing proportion of low-income parties served rather than an absolute increase in numbers. Of the 7,002 parties served in FY2024, only 564 shared information on their income, which covered a variety of income

levels ranging from \$0-9,999 to over \$65,000 annually. Despite the data suggesting a significant portion of respondents with incomes above \$40,000 (310), these numbers represent only 8% of the total parties served (564 out of 7,002). This limited response rate may not fully reflect the income distribution of all parties served. However, despite the higher-income trend among respondents, Centers reported in their end-of-year grant-making submissions that most of the parties served were in lower income brackets. For example, at least one Center reported that 60% of the parties served earned less than \$65,000, while another noted that 30% of individuals served were below the poverty line. This contrast highlights the need for improved income reporting to gain a clearer understanding of the populations served and their economic needs.

#### **4.4 Party Satisfaction and Mediation Success**

In FY2024, disputing parties successfully resolved their conflicts through mediation provided by Centers, with 4,203 cases closed. Of these, 2,305 cases were mediated, resulting in a 70% agreement rate. Specifically, 1,489 cases reached full agreements, while 117 reached partial agreements, demonstrating the effectiveness of mediation in resolving disputes. This 70% agreement rate is consistent with rates from FY2017 to FY2023 and continue a trend of surpassing the typical community mediation agreement rate of 66%.<sup>11</sup>

Party feedback further underscores the success of these efforts, with a large majority indicating a positive experience with mediation. Out of 958 parties who provided evaluations, 877 (91%) expressed satisfaction with the mediation process, while 898 (94%) indicated they would recommend mediation to others. Furthermore, 772 (81%) parties preferred mediation over alternative services, suggesting strong trust and preference for this dispute resolution method. Despite challenges in collecting evaluations, particularly for remote cases, 10 Centers successfully gathered survey data from 958 parties, significantly up from 254 parties in FY2023. This growth in both agreement rates and party satisfaction reflects the continued success of Centers in meeting community needs and fostering effective conflict resolution through mediation.

#### **4.5 Additional Programming Leveraged**

The benefits accruing to parties from mediation may be illustrated by the successfully mediated consumer, landlord-tenant, parenting and agricultural disputes during FY2024. A total of \$3,409,661.55 were recovered by parties in consumer and landlord-tenant disputes that were resolved with assistance from mediators at CMC Grant Program-funded Centers that collectively received \$417,800 in Face-To-Face Consumer Mediation Program grants from the Attorney General's Office (AGO). Due to the Centers' mediation services, the amount recovered amounted to an eight-fold leveraging of the AGO's FY2024 investment.

As for parenting disputes about child access and visitation, which were mediated by state-funded Centers under the auspices of MOPC's Parent Mediation Program (PMP) funded by the Department of Revenue

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<sup>11</sup> Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Education. (2020). *Trends in dispute resolution under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED610495.pdf>

(DOR), all surveyed parties reported benefits to families from mediation, including completing or partially developing a parenting plan for parents' access to and time with the child.

Through the Agricultural Mediation Program administered by MOPC with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, participating state-funded Center mediators helped resolve disputes to sustain community/family farm businesses and farmlands.

All three of these statewide mediation programs operated outside the CMC Grant Program are built on community mediation infrastructure funded through the Program, which enables the leveraging of these additional programmatic funding streams and greater impact for communities.

## **5 Economic Impact**

MOPC, as part of its program evaluation of the CMC Grant Program, collects and analyzes data to establish the impact of community mediation in courts, schools, and neighborhoods. Data gathering is conducted quarterly through the submission of data reports from Centers generated through MADtrac, a comprehensive performance-based grant application and renewal process where Centers detail their activities, and an annual survey to the Centers that captures full-year data after the conclusion of each grant year. MADtrac, the database system, records all Center activities, including how many parties were served, how many volunteer hours were contributed, the number of disputes resolved, money saved to parties and other mediation outcomes, and demographic information, where it is provided. A related software program (STATtrac) is used to aggregate the data from all Centers. MOPC reviews this data's reliability through the definition of various data points, continuous training of Center staff, and triangulation with data from the survey and grant applications.

MOPC aims to enhance economic evaluations of the CMC Grant Program, with initial analyses providing insights into the costs and benefits associated with community mediation, informed by both empirical data and estimates from Massachusetts and other states as well.<sup>12</sup>

In traditional cost-benefit analyses, there is a tendency to emphasize monetized benefits while neglecting non-monetary outcomes, which many analysts recognize as crucial. These analyses often struggle to capture the full spectrum of a program's impact, where outcomes like reduced crime may not translate directly into monetary values. This does not necessarily mean that cost-benefit analysis is itself unwise, as problems arise when only one perspective is considered; it is important to adopt multiple perspectives

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<sup>12</sup> From the point of view of outcomes theory, an *effect-size* is formally defined as the amount of change in a higher-level outcome within an outcomes model that can be fully attributed to the causal effect of a lower-level step within the same outcomes model. See Duigan, P. (2009-2012). Types of economic evaluation analysis. Outcomes Theory Knowledge Base Article No. 251. Retrieved from <http://outcomestheory.wordpress.com/2011/10/21/types-of-economic-evaluation-analysis-2m7zd68aaz774-110/>; It must be noted that, where an assumption-based approach is used in this analysis, it is used because there is not enough empirical information to robustly determine what the effect-size actually is. Indeed, few measures of effectiveness will be perfectly reliable, but it is important that the most reliable measure be employed wherever available or the one that meets minimal standards. In most cases, finding a correlation between an alternative and a measure of effectiveness will be possible. It is hoped that the following preliminary economic analysis will provide some direction and guidance for a more robust economic analysis to follow.

in cost-outcome analyses.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it must be noted that even a robust cost-benefit analysis will struggle to ascertain the holistic outcomes and/or benefits of community mediation.

Any holistic estimation of community mediation costs and benefits must consider the unique features of community mediation, such as the psychosocial impact of mediation and the utilization of volunteer mediators. Lorig Charkoudian, Executive Director of Community Mediation Maryland, highlights that the “cost of mediation” encompasses not only financial expenses but also emotional and opportunity costs, which are more challenging to quantify.<sup>14</sup> Charkoudian further observes that: “Government and charitable subsidies of the financial cost (including provision of services by volunteer mediators) may bring the total cost down to a level where consumers are more likely to consume the socially optimal amount of mediation. But it is important to recognize the ripple benefits of mediation, and the fact that we can create value for peace that goes far beyond the financial.”

In this evaluation, MOPC analyzes both monetized and non-monetized outcomes of community mediation but focuses specifically on the monetized outcomes, or the Return on Investment (ROI), associated with state operational funds spent on publicly funded services of MOPC and 12 state-funded Centers.

This economic analysis is structured into three distinct components:

1. **Cost of Intervention Analysis:** This section outlines the costs of operating the intervention.
2. **Cost-Effectiveness Analysis:** This section evaluates the costs related to achieving a certain effect.<sup>15</sup>
3. **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** This section compares overall costs with the benefits of the intervention.<sup>16</sup>

Cost-effectiveness analysis links program costs to key outcomes or benefits, while cost-benefit analysis extends this by evaluating costs against the total monetary value of the program’s benefits. These analyses can be applied at any stage of program implementation and can support decision-makers in assessing program efficiency.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Yates, B. T. (1999). *Measuring and improving cost, cost-effectiveness, and cost-benefit for substance abuse treatment programs* (NIH Publication No. 99-4518). National Institute on Drug Abuse. Retrieved from <https://archives.nida.nih.gov/sites/default/files/costs.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office. (2007). *The mediation process: A guide for Maryland mediators* (Macro 009). Retrieved from <https://mdmediation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/macro009-february2007.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Yates (1999) defines cost-effectiveness as “the relationship between program costs and program effectiveness, that is, patient outcome. Costs are measured as dollars spent, whereas effectiveness or outcome is measured as changes in patients’ behaviors, thoughts, feelings, or biology... There is no single standard for ‘cost-effective.’ Generally, the term is used loosely as a way of saying that something probably costs less, or is more effective, than something else.”

<sup>16</sup> Yates (1999) defines cost-benefit analysis as “the measurement of both the costs and outcomes in monetary terms.”

<sup>17</sup> Cellini, S. R., & Kee, J. E. (2015). Cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis. In R. M. Kowalski & R. L. F. McKinley (Eds.), *The Wiley Handbook of Judgment and Decision Making* (pp. 24-1–24-14). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch24>

In the following analysis, all three models will be utilized to develop estimations of the economic impacts of community mediation in Massachusetts. Where relevant in this analysis, cost measurement data from past studies has been adjusted for inflation.

## 5.1 Cost of Intervention Analysis

### 1. Cost of Intervention Analysis of Massachusetts Community Mediation - Single and Multi-Intervention Comparison

*Methodology:* A cost-of-intervention analysis evaluates the cost of an intervention and estimates that cost in relation to the investment and its benefit. A multi-intervention comparison compares the costs of different interventions (e.g., Program One – \$1,000 per participant; Program Two – \$1,500 per participant). In the present analysis, the primary cost considered is the state funding provided to Centers through a structured grant process administered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as compared to the State of Maryland.

#### i. Cost of Setting up Existing Dispute Resolution Infrastructure

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- Prior to receiving funding in FY2013, Centers that had not received state funding through the Trial Court since FY2009 were experiencing severe financial challenges, raising the risk that many could cease operations.
- A 2000 study, based on a late 1990s survey of court-connected ADR programs, found that the average annual administrative cost per program/Center was \$34,500 at the time. Adjusted for inflation, this amount would be \$66,299 in FY2024.<sup>18</sup>
- In FY2024, the total cost of operating the 12 Centers, supported by CMC Grant Program funding, was \$2,473,500, averaging \$206,125 per Center.
- Re-investing in existing Centers with established networks of volunteers, referral sources, and programmatic funders, rather than creating new Centers, avoided the need to re-launch community mediation in Massachusetts.

*Cost of Intervention:* If all 12 Centers active in Massachusetts in FY2024 had closed due to a lack of state operational funding, the Commonwealth would have needed to appropriate \$795,588 to restart the Centers, using the administrative costs outlined in the 2000 court-connected ADR study as a baseline for start-up costs. However, any return on investment detailed in this report would not have been realized in FY2024, as the Centers would first need to fully relaunch operations by hiring new staff and rebuilding networks of volunteers, referral sources, and programmatic funders. Restoring operations to the current level—at a total cost of \$2,473,500, or an average of \$206,125 per Center—would also require reestablishing goodwill, reputation, trust, and social capital through extensive community outreach and education. This process could take months or even years and incur additional, unpredictable costs.

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<sup>18</sup> Cratsley, J. C. (2000). *Funding court-connected ADR: Helping people resolve conflicts*. Boston, MA: Supreme Judicial Court-Trial Court Standing Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution.



## ii. Cost of a Mediated Case Based on State Operational Investment

*Effect-size Estimation:* The Massachusetts Legislature invested \$1,296,000 in state operating grants under the CMC Grant Program to 12 Centers. In the same year, these Centers conducted 2,305 mediations. Using the state grant program investment as the cost, the estimated intervention cost of the CMC Grant Program is \$562 per mediated case.

*Cost of Intervention:* The cost of intervention is \$562 per mediated case.

## iii. Cost Per Community Mediation Hour vs. Private Mediation Hour

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- 12 funded Centers provided a total of 5,856 hours of pro bono mediation services.
- The hourly rate for a private mediation practitioner is around \$225-\$300 an hour per party, or a total of \$450-\$600 per hour of mediation.<sup>19</sup>

*Cost of Intervention:* Private mediation services typically cost at least \$225 per hour per case, for one or both parties, which would amount to an estimated \$1,317,600 for 5,856 hours of mediation charged to parties. In contrast, state-funded community mediation is generally offered free of charge to parties.

## 5.2 Cost-effectiveness Analysis

### 2. Cost-effectiveness Analysis of Massachusetts Community Mediation – Multi-intervention Comparison

*Methodology:* Cost-effectiveness analysis aims to compare the costs and effectiveness of two or more alternatives with similar objectives, enabling the use of diverse effectiveness measures if the program objectives align. This process involves calculating a cost-effectiveness ratio, which helps economists identify the most efficient intervention. The cost-effectiveness ratio is determined by dividing the cost of an intervention by its effectiveness, expressed as:

$$\text{Cost-Effectiveness Ratio} = \frac{\text{Cost of Intervention}}{\text{Effectiveness of Intervention}}$$

In this analysis, estimates are available of the attributable effect-size of the intervention on mid/high-level outcomes allowing the estimation of the cost of achieving a mid/high-level outcome effect-size of a certain amount and comparing this across more than one intervention.

### i. Cost-effective Grant Program Administration

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<sup>19</sup> This is in line with a notable study conducted in 1985 to compare court costs with dispute resolution program costs per case at the Durham Dispute Settlement Center. The evaluation found that the average per-case cost to Durham City, county, and State to process a case of the type handled by the Center was \$186. In comparison, cases handled by the Center cost \$72 per case. Sheppard, B., *Report to Durham Dispute Settlement Center on the Comparative Costs of Going to Court vs. Mediation*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 1985. Available at <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/resolving-community-conflict-dispute-settlement-center-durham-north-carolina>; Massachusetts Dispute Resolution Services, Fee schedule. <http://www.mdrs.com/fees>

- In FY2018 Maryland’s Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO) received \$274,279 from the state for its operating expenses, excluding salaries. When adjusted for inflation, this amount would be equivalent to \$330,895 in FY2024. In comparison, MOPC’s operating funding for FY2024 from UMass Boston was \$249,220.
- In addition, Community Mediation Maryland (CMM), the state’s technical assistance provider for community mediation, received \$260,000 in state operating funds. When adjusted for inflation in FY2024, this would be equivalent to \$330,581. These funds were used to provide technical assistance, including monitoring and evaluation, to Maryland’s community mediation programs. It is important to note that grant program administration services are carried out by MACRO. The total state operational funding for mediation program administration in Maryland in FY2018 was \$554,279, which, when adjusted for inflation in FY2024, would amount to \$704,747 (excluding salaries for MACRO staff). The combined total of these funding amounts is \$1,366,223.
- In FY2024, MOPC spent \$736,788 for administering grants to 12 Centers and related operational expenses, designing and implementing the CMC Grant Program, and the provision of technical services such as grant administration, and monitoring and evaluation.

*Cost-effectiveness:* The administrative expenses of MOPC’s CMC Grant Program are 29% lower than the combined administrative costs of Maryland’s dispute resolution office (MACRO) and community mediation administrative (CMM) costs. As a result, the cost-effectiveness ratio of Maryland’s community mediation grant program administration compared to Massachusetts’s is 1:2.

### 5.3 Cost-benefit Analysis

#### 3. Cost-benefit Analysis of Massachusetts Community Mediation based on State Operational Investment – Multi Intervention Comparison

*Methodology:* Cost-benefit analysis techniques are used to determine whether the benefits of a given alternative outweigh the costs, helping assess if the alternative is worthwhile in an absolute sense. If the cost-benefit ratio is greater than one, it indicates that the benefits exceed the costs. The cost-benefit ratio is calculated by dividing the benefit of the intervention by its cost, as follows:

$$BCR = \frac{\text{Benefit}}{\text{Cost}}$$

##### i. Cost-benefit of Homelessness Prevention from Eviction Prevention Mediation

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, 11 Centers mediated 462 housing cases under the HMP, 355 of which (77%) resulted in tenancy being preserved (evictions and/or homelessness avoided).

- The cost of one eviction in Massachusetts in 2013 was estimated between \$4,780-\$5,180 in lost rent (\$2,400), pre-trial costs (\$180), trial costs (\$500), and post-trial costs (\$1,700 to \$2,100).<sup>20</sup>
- For 355 potential evictions avoided, \$852,000 was saved in lost rent (\$2,400 x 355), \$63,900 in pre-trial costs (\$180 x 355), \$177,500 in trial costs (\$500 x 355), and \$603,500 in post-trial costs (\$1,700 x 355), for a total saving of \$1,696,900. Adjusted for inflation<sup>21</sup>, this would amount to \$2,317,800 in 2024.
- From Q1 to Q4 2019, the average length of stay for a family in a shelter was 363 days. The average daily rate for a shelter or motel stay in 2019 was \$150. The average annual cost for a family shelter stay is calculated as 363 x \$150 = \$54,450.<sup>22</sup> Adjusted for inflation, this would amount to \$68,041.

*Cost-benefit:* Based on the \$68,041 in avoided costs per family for each shelter stay, if a sample of 100 mediation cases resulted in tenancy being preserved and thereby avoided shelter use for those families, the state of Massachusetts would have saved an estimated \$6,804,100. Additionally, the potential costs of 355 evictions, had they not been prevented by housing mediation, would amount to \$2,317,800 in 2024 when adjusted for inflation.

## ii. Cost-benefit to the District Court from Juvenile Mediations

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In 1992, the cost of processing 3,660 juvenile cases in a year using mediation at the Haverhill District Court in Massachusetts was estimated at \$2,464,197, while the cost of processing these cases in court was estimated to be \$5,691,995. This is a cost saving of \$3,227,798 for the year.<sup>23</sup> The average savings per case was \$882, which, when adjusted for inflation, would be \$2,002 per case, amounting to a total cost savings of \$7,327,320.
- Based on the above figures, the cost of processing a juvenile case in court was \$1,555 or \$3,529 when adjusted for inflation. The cost of mediation for the same cases, according to the same study, was \$673 per case or \$1,527.65 when adjusted for inflation.
- In FY2024, Centers received 115 cases from the Juvenile Court and successfully helped resolve 80 juvenile cases, resulting in 80 full agreements.

*Cost-benefit:* At an average saving of \$2,002 per case to the District Court, Centers mediated 80 juvenile cases referred by the Juvenile Court, resulting in an estimated cost saving of \$160,160 from case

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<sup>20</sup> Mass Landlords, Net Figures. <https://masslandlords.net/laws/eviction-process-in-massachusetts/>

<sup>21</sup> Calculated using the CPI inflation calculator. <https://data.bls.gov/>

<sup>22</sup> Boston Bar Association. (2002). *Investing in Fairness, Justice, and Housing Stability: Assessing the Benefits of Full Legal Representation in Eviction Cases in Massachusetts*. Retrieved from <https://bostonbar.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/rtc-report-for-web-or-email.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> From a report titled *Expanding juvenile mediation in Massachusetts* from the Crime and Justice Foundation cited by Cratsley, *op. cit.*

processing alone for the respective District Courts. Additionally, by resolving these 80 juvenile cases outside of full court proceedings, the total estimated cost saving to the court is \$282,320.

### **iii. Cost-benefit to the Court from Successful Mediations Avoiding Trial**

#### *Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, 12 Centers conducted 910 successful mediations across the District, BMC, Probate and Family, and Land Courts, which were resolved outside of trial.
- The 1996 Civil Action Mediation pilot project in California estimated an average savings of 0.76 court days per case, or 713 court days for 935 cases. The savings to the court were estimated at \$3,943 per day, resulting in total savings of \$2.8 million. Adjusted for inflation, this would equate to \$8,007 saved per day to the court from mediation.
- A U.S. Department of Justice report found that ADR led to cost savings from avoided litigation or discovery expenses, amounting to \$15,521,275 in 2017 from 367 successful mediations.<sup>24</sup> Adjusted for inflation, this figure rises to \$19,817,970 in FY2024, or \$54,998 saved per case.
- Assuming a conservative cost-saving to the court of \$3,000 per case, and assuming all 910 cases avoided trial, Centers have saved an estimated \$2,730,000 to the court system from avoided trials in FY2024.

*Cost-benefit:* Centers have saved an estimated \$2,730,000 to the court system from 910 successful mediations in the District, BMC, Probate and Family, Juvenile, Housing and Land Courts in FY2024.

### **iv. Cost-savings in Legal Fees for Disputing Parties**

- On average, parties can save between 40-78 hours (about three and a half days) in attorney time through mediation.<sup>25</sup>
- In FY2024, Centers mediated 2,305 cases. If each mediated case reduced attorney time by four hours, this resulted in a total savings of around 9,220 hours of attorney time due to mediation.
- Lawyers can charge between \$388 and \$595 per hour<sup>26</sup> (depending on whether they are associates or partners) for legal services such as sending Lawyer's Letters, court appearances, etc. In some cases, rates may be as high as \$1,500 per hour. Assuming a very conservative avoidance of \$100 in legal fees per party per case, for each two-party case, disputing parties saved a minimum of \$1,844,000 in legal fees alone.

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<sup>24</sup> Oregon Department of Justice. (n.d.). Guide to Oregon's dispute resolution programs. Retrieved November 22, 2024, from <https://www.doj.state.or.us/adr/pdf/gen74031.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Judicial Council of California & Administrative Office of the Courts. (2004). *Evaluation of the Early Mediation Pilot Programs*. Retrieved from: <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/empprept.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Massachusetts Lawyer's Weekly, 2013 Rates for Lawyers. <http://masslawyersweekly.com/2013/10/11/the-going-rates/>

- Costs to parties include filing fees, which range from \$40 to \$150 per party in Massachusetts.<sup>27</sup> For small claims disputes (involving amounts less than \$7,000), private mediation practitioners may charge \$225 an hour.<sup>28</sup> Assuming an extremely conservative estimate of only \$100 in avoided filing fees per case, disputing parties served by Centers saved a minimum of \$922,000 in avoided filing fees.

*Cost-benefit:* Massachusetts disputing parties saved a minimum of \$1,844,000 in legal fees and an additional \$922,000 in avoided filing fees for parties from 2,305 cases mediated in FY2024. This brings the total cost savings to \$2,766,000 for those parties.

#### **v. Cost-benefit of Leveraged Volunteer Community Mediator Hours**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, 12 Centers maintained a roster of 400 (226 active) volunteer community mediators who, along with other volunteer mediators contributed 3,695 hours of volunteer community mediation services.
- At private market rates, the value of this volunteer work is estimated at \$831,375, based on a minimum private practitioner hourly rate of \$225 per hour.<sup>29</sup>
- Alternatively, if mediators were employed as hourly wage earners, the mean hourly wage for a mediator in Massachusetts could be as high as \$47.<sup>30</sup> The total value of these volunteer mediation hours would amount to \$173,665.

*Cost-benefit:* 400 (226 active) volunteer community mediators at 12 Centers contributed 3,695 hours of volunteer mediation services in FY2024, the value of which is estimated at \$831,375 at \$225 per hour (based on a private practitioner minimum hourly rate) or \$173,665 at an hourly wage of \$47 for a permanent employee (hourly wage for a mediator in Massachusetts).

#### **vi. Cost-benefit of Leveraged Volunteer Administrative Hours by Staff, Volunteers, Board and Interns**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, Centers leveraged an extra 3,206 hours (about 3 months) of volunteer administrative services from staff, volunteers, board members, and interns.

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<sup>27</sup> Massachusetts Court System, Court Filing Fees & Payment Information. <https://www.mass.gov/court-filing-fees-payment-information>

<sup>28</sup> The actual costs can be higher. The Massachusetts Dispute Resolution Service's standard fee for a mediation session with one neutral of two hours is \$575.00 per party. This is \$287.50 per hour, for the first two hours. Thereafter, the rate is \$225 per hour. Massachusetts Dispute Resolution Services. (n.d.). *Fees and costs*. Retrieved November 22, 2024, from <https://www.mdrs.com/fees/>

<sup>29</sup> Massachusetts Dispute Resolution Services, Fee schedule. <http://www.mdrs.com/fees>

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Tables. <http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes231022.html>

- At an estimated cost of \$25.50 an hour<sup>31</sup> (mean hourly wage for administrative assistant in Massachusetts), the volunteer administrative services leveraged by the 12 Centers are worth \$81,753.

*Cost-benefit:* In FY2024, Centers leveraged 3,206 hours of volunteer administrative services provided by staff, volunteers, board members, and interns for a total of \$81,753.

#### **vii. Cost-benefit from Funds Leveraged by Community Mediation**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, the Massachusetts Legislature invested \$3,213,465 (without the prior appropriation continued from FY2023) in the CMC Grant Program. The Program awarded \$2,539,600 in operating, program, and technical assistance grants to Centers. Of this total, \$823,539 was for Center core operations.
- Centers used the state operational investment to leverage an additional \$2,199,813 from other private, state, local and/or Federal government sponsors/funders, including private foundations.
- Centers used these funds to address critical public needs under the Massachusetts (Twelve-Point) model of community mediation and to further expand their community mediation missions.

*Cost-benefit:* 12 Centers leveraged over three dollars for every dollar of core operating costs invested by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, or a benefit-to-cost ratio of 1:3 per every dollar of operational funding provided under the CMC Grant Program.

#### **viii. Cost-benefit of Leveraged Mediation Trainings for Community Members**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, Centers trained 243 community members as mediators. Each 40-hour mediation course has a market value of \$1,525 per trainee.<sup>32</sup> The total market value of these Basic Mediation Trainings would amount to \$370,575.
- Centers also trained 1,611 persons in conflict resolution. The net cost of conflict resolution training, like workplace conflict resolution training, is \$1,495 at a private mediation training institution.<sup>33</sup> The total market value of these conflict resolution trainings would amount to \$2,408,445.
- Centers provided advanced mediation training (divorce, eviction, etc.) to 1,094 persons. The net cost of an advanced mediation training at a private mediation training institute is estimated

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2023 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates. [http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_ma.htm#43-0000](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ma.htm#43-0000)

<sup>32</sup> The rate charged by Mediation Works Inc., which is similar to a community mediation center in that, along with other Centers, MWI once received funding from the Trial Court. <https://www.mwi.org/mediation-training/how-to-become-a-mediator/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.mediationworks.com/events/boston-massachusetts-conflict-resolution-trainer-program/>

at a private market rate of \$1,900/person.<sup>34</sup> The total value of these advanced mediation trainings amounts to \$2,078,600.

- Centers also provided specialized training to 1,345 people. At a conservative cost of \$500 per trainee, the total specialized trainings leveraged would be \$672,500.
- Centers also trained 725 peer mediators. At a conservative cost estimate of \$100/trainee, the cost-benefit would amount to \$72,500.

*Cost-benefit:* In FY2024, 12 Centers trained 5,018 community members (243 in basic mediation, 1,611 in conflict resolution, 1,094 in advanced mediation, 1,345 in specialized mediation and 725 in peer mediation), the total benefit of which is worth an estimated \$5,602,620.

Based on the FY2024 state investment in community mediation, the benefit-cost ratio of leveraged mediation training to communities is 1:2.2 – or for every dollar invested by the state Legislature in FY2024, Centers leveraged an extra \$2.20 worth of mediation training to community members.

#### **ix. Cost-benefits to Massachusetts Consumers**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office (AGO) provided \$417,800 to 12 Centers whose operations are funded by the CMC Grant Program for conducting Face-To-Face (FTF) consumer mediations.
- Using AGO data, Centers helped parties recover \$3,409,662 in FY2024.

*Cost-benefit:* The AGO provided \$417,800 to 12 Centers in FY2024 for conducting FTF consumer mediations. The 12 Centers helped parties recover \$3,409,662.

The benefit-cost ratio of the consumer mediation funds provided by the AGO is 1:1.4 - or for every dollar invested by the AGO in state-sponsored Massachusetts community mediation, consumers are recovering \$1.40 from FTF consumer mediations.

#### **x. Assumed Cost-benefit to Schools**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- A 2003 study by the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution found that schools saved an average of \$331 per averted student suspension or expulsion through successful student peer mediations.<sup>35</sup> When adjusted for inflation in 2024, this savings increases to \$574 per case. More recently, a 2016 study by UCLA estimated that the national economic loss from school

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.mwi.org/mediation-training/> MWI. (n.d.). *Mediation training*. Retrieved November 22, 2024, from <https://www.mwi.org/mediation-training/>

<sup>35</sup> The Student Peace Alliance, *op. cit.*, citing Hart, R. C., Shelestak, D., & Horwood, T. J. (2003, February). *Cost savings report on school conflict management program*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, Bureau of Research Training and Services. Retrieved from: <https://peacealliance.org/community-youth-peacebuilding-solutions-factsheet/>

suspensions is \$35 billion.<sup>36</sup> In California, a single non-graduate generates an average economic loss of \$579,820 over their lifetime, which, when adjusted for inflation, equates to \$771,317.

- In FY2024, Centers conducted 284 successful peer mediations, which are assumed to have resulted in avoided student suspensions or expulsions.<sup>37</sup>

*Cost-effectiveness:* By preventing suspensions or expulsions, schools saved an estimated \$163,016 from the 284 successful peer mediations conducted by Centers, valued at \$574 per case. However, the actual cost savings could be significantly higher. If the 284 mediations had not occurred and instead led to suspensions and/or dropouts, the potential economic loss to the state could have reached as high as \$219 million over the lifetime of the affected students.

#### **xi. Cost-benefit to Divorcing Couples**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- The average cost of private divorce mediation is estimated to cost up to \$5,000 per case.<sup>38</sup>
- In FY2024, Centers conducted 118 divorce mediations.

*Cost-effectiveness:* The average cost of private divorce mediation is estimated at \$5,000 per case. In FY2024, Centers conducted 118 successful divorce mediations. Assuming the mediations were conducted for free, parties to the 118 successful divorce mediations saved an estimated \$590,000.

#### **xii. Cost-benefit from Complex Multi-party Mediations**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, Centers conducted 61 complex multi-party mediations.
- If the complex multi-party mediations involved four parties and concluded in one seven-hour session (full-day mediation session), the estimated cost of one complex multi-party mediation case would amount to \$14,200, based on a private, full-day mediation session, which is \$3,500.00 per party.<sup>39</sup>
- Assuming an average cost benefit of \$7,100 per case (50% of private mediator charges), these Centers have saved a total of \$433,100 to the disputing parties.

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<sup>36</sup> Crockett, B., & Losen, D. (2017, March 7). *School suspensions cost California billions*. School Suspensions Cost California Billions - The Civil Rights Project at UCLA. Retrieved from: <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/news/press-releases/2017-press-releases/school-suspensions-cost-california-%20billions-1>

<sup>37</sup> Based on data from school discipline records, conduct grades, and ratings of anti-social behavior, researchers found that peer mediation reduced student anti-social behavior by one-third. Garrard, W. M., & Lipsey, M. W. (2007). Conflict resolution education and antisocial behavior in U.S. schools: A meta-analysis. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 25(1), 9-37. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.188>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/legal/divorce/how-much-does-divorce-cost/>

<sup>39</sup> Assumed as a complex, multi-party full-day mediation session. Massachusetts Dispute Resolution Services, Fee schedule. <http://www.mdrs.com/fees>



*Cost-effectiveness:* In FY2024, Centers saved \$433,100 to disputing parties in 61 complex multi-party mediations at an average saving of \$7,100 per case.

### **xiii. Cost-benefit to Local Businesses/Organizations**

*Effect-size Estimation:*

- In FY2024, Centers conducted eight successful workplace mediations.
- A study on workplace conflict found that U.S. employees spend 2.8 hours per week dealing with conflict, equating to approximately \$359 billion in paid hours in 2008, where 25% of employees said that avoiding conflict led to sickness or absence from work.<sup>40</sup>
- Replacing an employee will cost a business 150 to 200% more than that employee's salary and benefits which means that losing even a mid-level employee making \$30,000 a year could cost a company \$70,000 or more to replace.<sup>41</sup> Adjusted for inflation, this would amount to \$98,467 in FY2024.<sup>42</sup>
- This estimation will use an assumed conservative cost of \$10,000 per workforce conflict.

*Cost-effectiveness:* Assuming a resolved workplace conflict saved a conservative average sum of \$10,000 for a local organization, a total of \$80,000 was saved for local businesses/organizations from eight workplace mediations by Centers in FY2024.

## **5.4 Summary of Economic Analyses**

### **Cost-savings from Massachusetts Community Mediation in FY2024: \$20,893,598**

1. \$6,804,100 saved in avoided shelter costs from 355 avoided homeless shelter use.\*\*
2. \$3,409,662 recovered by consumers from consumer mediations.\*
3. \$2,766,000 avoided lawyer fees and filing fees from 2,305 cases mediated.\*
4. \$2,730,000 saved to court system/state from 910 successful mediations avoiding litigation.\*\*
5. \$2,317,800 saved in recovered rent, avoided pre-trial, trial, and post-trial costs from 355 housing mediations.\*
6. \$1,317,600 saved from 5,856 private mediation hours avoided.\*
7. \$590,000 saved to parties from not using private mediators in 118 divorce mediations.\*

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<sup>40</sup> This study found that the average legal fee paid by those successfully using mediation was \$1,630, compared to \$1,800 - \$2,360 for those who rejected mediations. Pearson, J., & Thoennes, N. (1984). Mediating and litigating custody disputes: A longitudinal evaluation. *Family Law Quarterly*, 17(4), 497-518

<sup>41</sup> Wilhelm, J. (2009, October 13). The real cost of workplace conflict. Entrepreneur. Retrieved November 22, 2024, from <https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/the-real-cost-of-workplace-conflict-employee-conflict/207196>

<sup>42</sup> CPP Global. (2008). *Workplace Conflict and How Businesses Can Harness it to Thrive*. Retrieved from: [https://img.en25.com/Web/ CPP/Conflict\\_report.pdf](https://img.en25.com/Web/ CPP/Conflict_report.pdf)

8. \$433,100 saved to parties from 61 complex multi-party disputes.\*
9. \$282,320 saved from 80 juvenile cases that avoided going to court.\*\*
10. \$163,016 saved from avoided student suspensions from 284 peer mediations.\*\*
11. \$80,000 saved for local businesses/organizations from eight workplace mediations.\*

### **Resources Leveraged by Massachusetts Community Mediation in FY2024: \$9,511,149**

1. \$5,602,620 of mediation and conflict resolution training for 5,018 community members.\*
2. \$2,199,813 in additional state, federal, and/or private foundation funds raised by Centers from \$985,000 in state operating grants.\*\*
3. \$831,375 leveraged from 3,695 volunteer community mediation hours leveraged.\*
4. \$795,588 from re-investing in existing Centers with established networks of volunteers, referral sources and programmatic funders.\*\*
5. \$81,753 leveraged from 3,206 hours of volunteer administrative services.\*\*

The total return on the state's FY2024 investment of \$3,213,465 in Massachusetts community mediation through the CMC Grant Program was \$30,404,747.

The significant ROI highlights the Program's effectiveness. In FY2024, for every \$1 invested by the Commonwealth, \$9.46 in savings and leveraged resources was generated, amounting to an estimated total of \$30.4 million in cost savings for both the Commonwealth (\$13.1 million\*\*) and the parties served (\$17.3 million\*). This nearly tenfold ROI demonstrates how the CMC Grant Program not only supports the sustainability of Centers but also creates broad, long-lasting societal and economic benefits.

## **6 Conclusion**

The CMC Grant Program is a critical pillar of community mediation funding in Massachusetts. In FY2024, the Commonwealth invested \$3,213,465 into the Program, supplemented by \$149,674 carried over from FY2023, resulting in a total allocation of \$3,363,139. This funding directly supported 12 Centers across the state, enabling them to offer free or low-cost dispute resolution services that address pressing social issues such as homelessness, recidivism, youth violence, and systemic injustice. Moreover, the Program's Twelve-Point Model has played a central role in advancing DEI goals, ensuring these services meet the diverse needs of Massachusetts residents.

Of the total funding, \$2,542,100 (more than 50% of the income of Centers) was awarded as operational, programmatic, and technical assistance grants, which were essential in attracting an additional \$2,199,813 from private foundations and other state, local, and federal sources. This demonstrates the Program's remarkable ability to leverage state investment to expand the reach and impact of community mediation services. These leveraged funds helped support statewide programs like the HMP, ReMAp, Youth Program, and DEI capacity-building initiatives. These programs have had a substantial effect, addressing critical needs such as improving school climate, enhancing child welfare, stabilizing housing, reducing recidivism, and promoting greater DEI within the Centers themselves.

In addition to the financial returns, the Program's outreach and service delivery expanded significantly. In FY2024, 498 trainings and workshops were conducted, engaging 5,018 participants, while 681,921

people across Massachusetts were reached through public education and outreach efforts. This extensive outreach strengthened community involvement and ensured a steady pipeline of volunteer mediators, with 523 volunteers supporting the Centers' work. In total, 7,002 parties received mediation services, achieving a 70% agreement rate—above the national average of 66%. This strong performance underscores the value of community mediation in resolving disputes efficiently and equitably.

The focus on DEI within the Program continued to yield positive results, with the percentage of non-White mediators rising to 34% in FY2024, an increase from 31% the previous year. These efforts were bolstered by \$100,000 in DEI-specific grants, which funded organizational assessments and strategic changes aimed at dismantling institutional racism and improving accessibility for underrepresented communities. As a result, Centers are becoming more representative of the diverse populations they serve, reflecting a commitment to equitable access to justice and conflict resolution.

Staffing within the Centers also grew significantly in FY2024. Centers employed 32 full-time and 33 part-time staff, an increase from the previous year. However, the Centers have expressed ongoing needs for additional funding to address staff retention, salary improvements, and professional development for both staff and volunteer mediators. This highlights the ongoing challenge of sustaining and growing a high-quality workforce. Despite these challenges, Centers continue to improve their ability to meet the needs of their communities, providing vital services in both in-person and virtual formats, as appropriate.

While the CMC Grant Program has achieved significant progress, challenges remain. The Centers continue to face the need for additional resources to expand staffing, enhance volunteer recruitment, and increase salaries to retain skilled professionals. Furthermore, achieving full demographic representation among mediators and increasing awareness of mediation services in underserved communities will require sustained effort and investment.

In conclusion, the CMC Grant Program is a cornerstone of dispute resolution in Massachusetts, providing valuable services that contribute to the well-being of communities across the state. The Program has demonstrated remarkable growth and impact over the years, offering significant economic returns, expanding DEI efforts, and adapting to the evolving needs of the community. To build on these successes, increasing state funding, strengthening partnerships with community organizations, and refining evaluation tools will be essential in maximizing the Program's impact. With continued investment, the CMC Grant Program is well-positioned to remain a vital resource in promoting access to justice and fostering community cohesion in Massachusetts for years to come.

## **7 Recommendations**

### **7.1 The Commonwealth should increase its framework funding in community mediation infrastructure.**

This evaluation highlights the need for increased state funding for the CMC Grant Program to sustain Center operations and expand their impact. State support, comprising over half of the Centers' collective income, is critical to addressing challenges like staff retention, operational stability, and program scalability. Enhanced investment would enable Centers to offer competitive salaries and benefits, recruit diverse volunteer mediators, and cover rising operational costs, including technology upgrades (e.g., RAM database) and outreach efforts. Additional funding would also expand successful initiatives like the Housing Mediation Program, Reentry Mediation Program, and Youth Conflict Resolution and

Restorative Practices Program, addressing critical societal needs such as housing stability, recidivism, and youth violence. Additional funding will allow MOPC and the Centers to hire more staff, expand services to underserved regions, and pilot innovative initiatives like regional mediation units for housing disputes. Investments should also support hybrid service models, integrating in-person and virtual mediation, to ensure accessibility for all populations. Continuing multi-year CMC Grant Program funding would provide financial stability, while leveraging state investments to secure private and federal matching grants could amplify the Program's reach. Increased support would also strengthen MOPC's capacity for advocacy, awareness, and evaluation, ensuring the Program's continued growth and impact across Massachusetts.

## **7.2 The Commonwealth should increase investment in CMC Grant Program DEI Initiatives to expand access to justice for underserved communities.**

The FY2024 evaluation of the CMC Grant Program highlights the ongoing need to expand and enhance DEI initiatives. Although progress has been made, such as increasing the diversity of mediators to 34% non-White and engaging more diverse communities, there are still opportunities to ensure equitable access to mediation services for all individuals and communities. Increased and sustained funding for DEI-specific initiatives is crucial, building on the \$100,000 allocated in FY2024 for impactful projects like multilingual resources, bilingual staff, and inclusive policy revisions. Funding should be expanded, particularly in underserved areas, and focus on hiring DEI coordinators and implementing outreach campaigns to engage and serve communities with high need and low mediation awareness.

Language accessibility remains a key priority, and Centers should continue to develop multilingual resources while partnering with cultural organizations to ensure services meet the needs of diverse populations. Recruitment and retention of diverse mediators should also be prioritized through innovative strategies, including partnerships with universities and community groups, as well as offering scholarships for aspiring mediators from historically excluded backgrounds. Further efforts are needed to address systemic barriers within Center operations and governance, with Centers encouraged to develop comprehensive DEI action plans that include measurable goals and accountability mechanisms. Training for staff, mediators, and board members should continue to expand, covering topics like cultural competence, implicit bias, and equity-driven mediation strategies. Additionally, DEI efforts should extend to expanding services beyond mediation, such as restorative justice circles and conflict resolution workshops, to address inequities in access. Centers should consider collaborating with schools and housing agencies to implement culturally responsive programs and ensure marginalized groups have access to services.

## **7.3 The CMC Grant Program should continue building capacity for specialized programs.**

The growing demand for community mediation services, reflected in the increase in cases in FY2024, calls for scaling operations to meet growing needs sustainably. The CMC Grant Program should explore pilot funding and staffing models, such as regionally shared resources among Centers and partnerships with local funders and higher education institutions to expand financial and human resources. Utilizing

data from the new RAM database system will help identify high-demand areas and guide resource allocation.

Formal agreements with additional correctional facilities, parole boards, and community reentry programs would continue to streamline referrals for the Reentry Mediation Program, while partnerships with additional schools and juvenile courts would strengthen youth restorative practices. Collaborating strategically with local governments and service providers will align programs with regional needs, creating opportunities for co-funding and resource sharing.

Specialized programs require mediators with specific expertise, such as knowledge of tenancy laws for housing mediators or trauma-informed practices for reentry mediators. Training in foreclosure mediation would enable housing mediators to help homeowners in addition to tenants and landlords. To ensure quality service delivery, MOPC and Centers should invest in advanced training, certification, and professional development opportunities. Peer learning and mentorship programs will further enhance mediators' skills. Raising awareness through targeted outreach campaigns, digital platforms, social media, and collaboration with advocacy groups will ensure these specialized programs reach their intended audiences, building trust and engagement among target populations.

#### **7.4 Centers should continue to expand outreach and community engagement.**

Expanding outreach and community engagement remains a strategic priority for the CMC Grant Program. In FY2024, Centers engaged over 681,921 people through training and outreach, yet gaps still exist, particularly in reaching specific groups such as parents and underserved populations. Targeted public education campaigns, partnerships with local organizations, and youth-focused marketing strategies are essential to raise awareness and participation.

Public education campaigns should emphasize the benefits of mediation, addressing issues like housing stability, youth violence, and family conflicts, and be delivered across multiple platforms, including social media, newspapers, and radio. Tailoring these campaigns for non-English speaking populations and collaborating with trusted local organizations, schools, and faith-based groups will further enhance reach. Collaborations with housing authorities, veterans' organizations, and senior centers will also extend the availability of specialized programs.

Youth-focused outreach is crucial, as many parents remain unaware of the Youth Program. Centers should develop marketing strategies aimed at parents, including workshops, school newsletters, and testimonials from students, while also engaging youth organizations in outreach efforts. Community events, such as town fairs and cultural festivals, provide valuable opportunities for direct engagement and relationship-building. Expanding the use of digital tools like user-friendly websites, social media platforms, and video content can further boost outreach, particularly to younger audiences. Data collection and analysis will help Centers tailor outreach efforts to underserved areas, while regular evaluation ensures strategies meet community needs. MOPC can support these efforts by providing shared resources, organizing statewide campaigns, and facilitating knowledge-sharing among Centers to enhance the collective impact of outreach initiatives.

## **7.5 MOPC and Centers should continue to foster greater collaboration among Centers.**

Collaboration has been a key element in the success of the CMC Grant Program, driving innovation and resource-sharing. MOPC-facilitated program learning communities and capacity-building initiatives, such as the Trainer Development Project (TDP), have played a vital role in networking, cross-Center support, and the sharing of best practices. To further strengthen these efforts, the scope of learning communities should be expanded to address specific needs, such as engaging underserved populations and integrating DEI principles into mediation practices. A centralized resource hub could also be established, serving as a repository for training materials, case studies, outreach strategies, and evaluation tools, enabling Centers to access and share successful practices. Additionally, formalizing inter-Center mentorship programs could support smaller or newer Centers by facilitating knowledge transfer and collaborative learning, particularly in specialized areas like housing mediation. Expanding shared staffing models and joint initiatives, such as regional mediation services or shared mediator pools, would help extend the Program's reach and ensure more communities have access to mediation services. Regular statewide or regional convenings could also be organized to allow Centers to discuss trends, share updates, and explore opportunities for joint projects, while offering professional development sessions tailored to collective needs.

## **7.6 Centers should embrace and fully integrate the new Resolution Activity Manager (RAM) System into operations.**

To fully leverage the capabilities of the new Resolution Activity Manager (RAM) system, its seamless integration into daily operations across all Centers is essential. Comprehensive training should be provided by the CMC Grant Program to staff at all levels to ensure familiarity with system features, such as data entry, reporting, and analytics, with ongoing technical support to resolve issues and incorporate user feedback. Establishing a centralized knowledge hub with tutorials and troubleshooting guides would further support users. The CMC Grant Program should also invest in advanced analytics, including AI tools, to identify trends, forecast demand, and analyze party feedback, enabling data-driven decisions. As the RAM system evolves, updates should enhance its functionality, such as automated reporting, integration with external data, and mobile accessibility, while ensuring advanced data security measures are in place to protect sensitive information. By using data from the RAM system to generate compelling reports and case studies, the Program can effectively demonstrate its impact to policymakers, funders, and the public, securing additional resources and reinforcing the value of community mediation.

## **7.7 MOPC should continue investing in data gathering and technology to demonstrate the impact of the CMC Grant Program and Center services.**

Continued investment in data gathering and technology is essential to enhance the CMC Grant Program's ability to measure its impact and demonstrate its value. While progress has been made in standardizing evaluation tools, there is a need to develop standardized metrics to measure long-term outcomes, such as reductions in recidivism or sustained housing stability, especially for specialized programs like the Reentry Mediation Program and Housing Mediation Program. Periodic needs

assessments should be conducted to identify service gaps and emerging community needs, ensuring resources are allocated effectively. Expanding feedback collection, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews, will provide valuable qualitative insights into the effectiveness of services and highlight areas for improvement. Leveraging technology, including the RAM system, will streamline data collection, automate analysis, and improve real-time reporting, enabling Centers to make informed decisions. Sharing evaluation findings through accessible reports, infographics, and success stories will help build trust with stakeholders and secure continued support for the Program.