

**Just for Youth:
Advocating for Youths in the
Massachusetts
Department of Youth Services**



**The Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
Third Edition (updated through May 2011)**

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The Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee (MHLAC) helps children and adults with mental health and other disabilities protect their rights and obtain appropriate services. A state agency of the Supreme Judicial Court, we provide legal advice and representation on issues including: access to services; rights regarding treatment; custody and visitation; insurance; education; discrimination; and rights in institutions and the community. For assistance, call MHLAC's Intake Line at (617) 338-2345 ext. 120 or (800) 342-9092 ext. 120. MHLAC is located at 24 School St., 8th floor, Boston, MA 02108.

MHLAC's DYS Project provides legal advice and representation to youth involved with DYS on issues including: mental health assessment and care; education; appropriate placement; rights in facilities; restraint; disability discrimination; and transition to the community. More information is available at http://www.mhlac.org/DYS_Project.htm. For legal assistance on a matter involving a DYS-involved youth, call the DYS Project at (617) 338-2345 ext. 124 or (800) 342-9092 ext. 124.

This book is updated periodically. For the most updated information, please consult the online version at <http://www.mhlac.org/justforyouth.html>. Additionally, the nine checklists for families (contained here in Appendix C) are also available at http://www.mhlac.org/DYS_Checklists.htm.

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The cover art, entitled "Blue Tears," was created by Lacey, a participant in H.U.M.A.N. (Hear Us Make Artistic Noise), a visual arts program for girls in the juvenile justice system. H.U.M.A.N., originally an initiative of the Juvenile Rights Advocacy Project at Boston College Law School, is now called Artistic Noise. More information is available at <http://www.artisticnoise.org/>.

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PREFACE

This book is for parents, legal guardians (including the Department of Children and Families) and other caregivers of youth in the custody of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS) or at risk of entering DHS custody. In addition, we hope that this book can be useful to youth in DHS custody themselves. While the book is written for lay people, it also should be helpful to professionals working in this area including advocates, providers, and administrators.

This book describes the basic steps that a youth typically follows within the DHS system, from the point of arrest until discharge from DHS. The book is focused particularly on the rights of a youth involved with DHS. The book explores two areas closely: 1) mental health/substance abuse services; and 2) education.

This book uses the pronoun “he” for simplicity. However, a growing proportion of youth involved with DHS are girls. This book is for both boys and girls involved with DHS.

Appendix C of this book is a set of checklists for actions that a youth and his family can take at various stages of the youth’s involvement with DHS. The checklists duplicate (but simplify) the information contained in certain of the book’s chapters.

While this book outlines a youth’s rights when involved with DHS, it is not a substitute for legal advice or representation. Seek the help of a lawyer or outside advocate when questions regarding rights arise. Legal and advocacy resources are listed in the Resource Guide at the end of this book.

The Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee greatly appreciates the work of the many individuals who helped us create this book. Their contributions are described in the “Acknowledgements” at the end of this book.

Since the beginning of this publication, Jennifer Honig of the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee has served as coordinator and editor-in-chief. Her writing and editorial contributions made this publication possible.

If you notice incorrect information in this book, or if you think that there is some information that should be included, please contact Jennifer Honig at jhonig@mhlac.org or (617) 338-2345 ext. 125.

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Executive Director
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee

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