



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

December 14, 2023

The Honorable Maura Healey
Governor of Massachusetts
State House Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

Secretary Matthew Gorzkowicz
Executive Office of Administration and Finance
State House Room 373
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Access to Counsel Program for Evictions Dedicated Line Item FY25 Budget Request of \$7 million
Dear Governor Healey and Secretary Gorzkowicz:

On behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, we respectfully urge you to include in the FY25 budget language the establishment of an Access to Counsel Program for low-income tenants and low-income owner occupants in eviction proceedings, and funding of \$7 million to launch the initial phase of this program.

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) supports collaborative solutions across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach that centers racial equity. It includes hundreds of partners from every community sector who are committed to making safe, decent and affordable housing a reality for all in western Massachusetts.

Access to counsel is urgently needed to prevent homelessness, stop illegal or unnecessary evictions and reduce displacement. Right now in Massachusetts, 9 out of 10 tenants are unrepresented while over 80% of landlords have legal representation. It is a system grossly out of balance, with profoundly lasting consequences for the tens of thousands of children and their parents who must suffer the experience of eviction.


In western Massachusetts, we have seen a 36% rise in eviction filings over the last year, totaling close to 4,000 filings in the last 8 months alone. Our 2023 homelessness point in time count in January, 2023 (prior to the migrant family crisis), showed the highest increase in homelessness since any point over the last 5 years, totaling an estimated 3,305 individuals in the four western counties.

There are two Access to Counsel bills this session, both of which have been heard in committee and enjoy broad support: S.864 and H.1731. These bills provide tenants and owner-occupants whose incomes are below 80% of Area Median Income with full legal representation in the eviction process.

At a time when Massachusetts is facing unprecedented demand for shelter, when every tool must be harnessed to create greater housing stability, we urge you to include your FY25 budget \$7 million to begin phasing in a statewide Access to Counsel program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela Schwartz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pamela Schwartz, Director
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