Prevent Evictions During COVID

Co-Sponsor Amendment #175
to S.2842, An Act Enabling partnerships for growth

A statewide right to counsel pilot is part of an essential response to the eviction tidal wave expected when the moratorium lifts

The Governor has extended the eviction moratorium to October 17 providing needed temporary relief. But when the moratorium ends, courts will be flooded with evictions.

- Estimates have been that 15,000 – 20,000 new evictions could be filed.
- Frontline non-profits are inundated with calls from tenants unable to pay rent.
- Applications for emergency rental assistance payments are off the charts.
- Families with children & workers of color re especially at risk of housing instability.

Comprehensive Response Needed

To avert a coming eviction crisis, we need a comprehensive eviction prevention response that includes rental assistance, preventing evictions before court, and legal representation in eviction cases in court to stabilize people’s housing. Amendment 175: A Right to Counsel would protect renters & owner-occupants in areas of the state hardest hit by COVID through:

- A right to counsel pilot that would provide full legal representation in eviction cases to tenants & owner-occupants whose incomes do not exceed 200% of poverty.
- Legal representation would be provided by designated non-profit organizations with expertise in housing law and experience representing low-income people.
- Projects would be established statewide in at least two areas within each of the Housing Court’s six divisions, depending on the resources available.
- Pilot locations would be selected based on certain indicators that capture the devastation that COVID-19 has had on renters and lower-income homeowners.
- Given the need for rapid implementation, the pilot would be based in the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development with clear and quick time frames.
- Funding for the pilot must come from COVID relief and other sources, including private sources, that do not impact state funding for essential frontline civil legal aid, housing stabilization, and affordable housing programs.

Over 90% of tenants face eviction without legal representation, while 78% of landlords have legal representation. It’s time to change this disparity.
The **Right to Counsel Coalition** is broad based coalition that is urging Governor Baker to invest $6 million from federal Coronavirus Relief Funds to for a right to counsel pilot to provide representation to approximately 4,800 households. Our Mass. U.S. Representatives have sent a [letter](#) to the Governor supporting this request.