

## Unsheltered Veterans in Crisis

On a single night in January 2020, almost 40,000 veterans were experiencing homelessness in the United States.<sup>1</sup> This number was an increase from 2019, and the increase was entirely among veterans in unsheltered places including on the street, in abandoned buildings, or in other places not suitable for human habitation.<sup>2</sup>

## Veteran Homelessness

As of Jan 2020, about 900 veterans in Mass were experiencing homelessness.<sup>3</sup> Compared to other states, the rate of veteran homelessness in Mass is decreasing more slowly than the rest of the country.<sup>4</sup> Often, veteran homelessness intersects with substance use and mental health conditions.<sup>5</sup>

## Affordability Crisis

There are approximately 300,000 veterans in Massachusetts.<sup>6</sup> Of these, approximately 60,000 veterans live in homes with unsafe conditions, overcrowding, or where the veteran suffers from high rent burden.<sup>7</sup> Housing affordability is the greatest housing problem among veterans with about 31.1% of Mass veterans paying too much for housing.<sup>8</sup>

## VA Worried of Eviction Moratoria End

The Department of Veterans Affairs stated that it “is deeply concerned about possible dramatic increase in homelessness when eviction moratoria are lifted.”<sup>9</sup> Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz stated that “the moratorium probably saved a lot of veterans from being evicted, and once you’re homeless it’s nearly impossible to get out of homelessness and its very expensive to do.”<sup>10</sup>

## Access to Counsel Changes Lives

As of June 2021, under a temporary expanded legal assistance project in Mass, 90% of eviction cases resulted in the tenancy being preserved or tenants receiving additional time to move out.<sup>11</sup> Right to counsel is a part of a comprehensive approach to level the playing field, prevent displacement, and provide housing stability for very vulnerable people in our communities. The Right to Counsel Coalition consists of over 200 diverse organizations including municipal leaders, property owners, and health care workers.

**“[O]nce you’re homeless it’s nearly impossible to get out of homelessness and its very expensive to do.”**

Rep. Ruben Gallego, June 17, 2021

**“Our veterans deserve better. We as a society and public policy planners have let them down.”**

Mayor Joseph Curtatone and Charles Gagnon  
CommonWealth, Aug. 8, 2021

## The Bills

S.874 and H.1436 would ensure that low-income tenants and owner-occupants of 1 to 3 family homes receive full legal representation. The program would be administered by the Mass Legal Assistance Corporation.

## Momentum behind RTC

On August 27, 2021, the Treasury, Justice, and Housing Departments jointly urged states and municipalities to seize the opportunity provided by COVID relief funds and use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support long term housing stability programs, including right to counsel.<sup>12</sup> Connecticut recently passed a right to counsel bill and funded it initially with \$20 million in ARPA dollars over 2 years.<sup>13</sup>

## Starting a Right to Counsel Program in Mass

The Right to Counsel Coalition is urging the Legislature to fund the Right to Counsel with **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and allocate \$78 million over the next three years, or \$26 million/year**, to launch the Right to Counsel in Massachusetts while a permanent source of funding is identified. Funding in the amount of \$26 million/year was recommended by a 2020 report from the BBA.

**For more information:  
MassRTC.org**

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, “HUD Releases 2020 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report Part 1, Homelessness Increasing Even Prior to COVID-19 Pandemic,” March 18, 2021, [https://www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/hud\\_no\\_21\\_041](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/hud_no_21_041)

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, “Massachusetts Homelessness Statistics,” <https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/ma/>

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Curtatone and Charles Gagnon, “Veterans Facing Homelessness Deserve More,” Commonwealth, August 8, 2021, <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/opinion/veterans-facing-homelessness-deserve-more/>

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> Housing Assistance Council, “Supporting Veterans in Massachusetts” Infographic, <http://www.veteransdata.info/states/2250000/MASSACHUSETTS.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Sisk, “VA Warns of ‘Dramatic Increase’ in Homeless Veterans as Eviction Moratorium Ends,” Military.com, June 17, 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/06/17/va-warns-of-dramatic-increase-homeless-veterans-eviction-moratorium-ends.html>

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation, 2021. CELHP Case Data Through 6/30/2021.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from U.S. Department of Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, U.S. Department of Justice Attorney General Merrick Garland, and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge to Governors, Mayors, County Executives, and Chief Justices/State Court Administrators, August 27, 2021, <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Eviction-Moratorium-Joint-Letter.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Connecticut Public Act No. 21-34 (2021), available at <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/ACT/PA/PDF/2021PA-00034-R00HB-06531-PA.PDF>