

Access to Counsel Coalition in Massachusetts

November 14, 2024

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

RE: **Ensure that Access to Counsel Program in Evictions Is Permanent and Stable and Include \$5 Million in Proposed FY26 House 1 Budget (Line Item 0321-1800)**

Dear Governor Healey,

On behalf of the Access to Counsel Coalition, over 240 organizations, thank you for including a dedicated line-item for \$3.5 Million for an Access to Counsel program in your proposed FY25 budget. This was a game changer and resulted in \$2.5 million to start a pilot program in the final FY25 budget.

We are grateful for your leadership.

Organizations and individuals who have fought for Access to Counsel over the past eight years celebrated this incredible milestone at La Colaborativa's Survival Center with our lead sponsors Senator DiDomenico, Representative Dave Rogers, and Representative Mike Day. We reflected on the campaign and with renewed energy committed to continuing the campaign to ensure that this is a permanent and sustainable program, as we also start the work.

"My hope is that families do not lose their homes like I did. My hope is that together we can build a statewide Access to Counsel Program in a steady way that will make it strong," Renee Spencer told the audience. Renee faced eviction unrepresented and spent two years moving from couch to couch.

What makes Access to Counsel different is that it is about full representation, not limited assistance. As a statewide pilot program begins, we need to assure legal services programs that when they commit to full representation they will have the staff resources to continue this commitment because they will be legally bound by a retainer to represent these clients.

Now it is critical to set Access to Counsel up for success and to set in motion a framework for a stable and sustainable program. This is not about growing a program fast, but growing it thoughtfully and well.

Your original line item was to start a permanent Access to Counsel program, subject to appropriation, not for a pilot program. We urge you to return to that vision and propose a full 12-months of funding at \$5 million so that legal services can sustain the capacity that it is building now.

Please find below draft budget language that simply removes the word “pilot” from the line-item in the final FY25 budget. It preserves important language proposed by the House and adopted by the Senate that recognizes that implementation is part of standing up a new program. It also preserves your original language that this program can grow subject to appropriation.

We are fortunate that the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Program (MLAC) is starting to implement Access to Counsel in a thoughtful and careful manner that will set it up for success. In October, MLAC conducted a survey of stakeholders to solicit input on how to focus the initial \$2.5 million. Shortly after, it published a Request for Proposals for designated organizations to apply for the funding with the goal of distributing funds from January 1, 2025 to the end of the fiscal year, a 6-month period.

It will take time to grow a strong program, build a solid pipeline from law schools, work with the courts, and for the data to unfold. But we are confident that, as other jurisdictions that have implemented permanent access to counsel programs have experienced, Massachusetts will see eviction filings and defaults decrease and housing stability increase.

Access to Counsel is a critical tool to prevent homelessness and keep people stably housed. We thank you again for your support and belief that a statewide Access to Counsel program is part of a comprehensive approach to providing housing for all and look forward to working with your administration to ensure success.

Sincerely on Behalf of the Access to Counsel Coalition’s Advisory Committee,



Annette Duke
Housing Attorney
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Cc: Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll
Secretary Matthew Gorkowicz, Executive Office of Administration and Finance
Kate Cook, Chief of Staff, Office of Governor Maura Healey
Paige Scott Reed, Chief Legal Counsel, Office of Governor Maura Healey
Martha Kwasknik, General Counsel for Exec Office for Administration and Finance
Christopher Marino, Asst. Secretary for Budget, Exec Office for Administration and Finance

Proposed FY2026 Budget Language

Access to Counsel

0321-1800 For the implementation of an access to counsel program; provided, that funds may be expended for costs associated with implementing the program; and provided further, that, subject to appropriation, funds shall be distributed by the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation to designated non-profit organizations to increase access to legal representation for low-income tenants and low-income owner occupants in eviction proceedings \$5,000,000

Access to Counsel Supporters

A broad coalition of municipal leaders, housing advocates, community organizations, health care providers, faith-based organizations, and large property owners have joined together to support a statewide access to counsel program in Massachusetts for low-income tenants and owner occupants in eviction proceedings.

Abundant Housing MA
Action for Boston Community Development
Action
Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness
AIDS Action/Fenway Health
Alliance of Cambridge Tenants
Allston/Brighton Community Develop Corp
Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
American Civil Liberties Union of Mass
Amherst Family Health Center
Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust
Amherst Town Council ([Resolution](#))
Arise for Social Justice
Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence
Bassuk Center
Beacon Communities
Beacon Residential Management
Berkshire County Regional Hsing Authority
BEST Hospitality Training
Beth Israel Lahey Health
Black Economic Justice Institute
Black Teachers Matter
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
Boston Bar Association
Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program
Boston Housing Authority
Boston Medical Center
Boston Public Health Commission
Boston Teachers Union
Boston Tenant Coalition
Brockton Neighborhood Health Center
Brockton Interfaith Community
Cambridge Health Alliance
Cambridge Residents Alliance
Casa Myrna
Cathedral Church of St. Paul
Catholic Charities Worcester County
Center for Human Development
Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
Charter Street Tenant Association
Chelsea Police Department
Chelsea Public School Committee Chair, Kelly Garcia
Children Advocacy Ctr of Suffolk County
Children's HealthWatch
Children's Services of Roxbury
Chinese Progressive Association
Citizens' Housing and Planning Assoc
City Life/Vida Urbana
City Mission Boston
City of Boston
City of Boston Veterans' Services
City of Boston ([Council Resolution](#))
City of Cambridge ([Council Resolution](#))
City Northampton ([Council Resolution](#))
City of Salem ([Council Resolution](#))
City of Springfield ([Council Resolution](#))
Coalition for Social Justice
Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation
Community Action Agency of Somerville
Community Action Pioneer Valley
Community Care Cooperative
Community Health Network for North Central Mass
Coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester
Cooley Dickinson Health Care, Northampton
Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals
Craig's Doors - A Home Association
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute
De Novo Center for Justice and Healing
Disability Policy Consortium
DOVE (Domestic Violence Ended)
East Boston Social Centers
Easthampton Affordable and Fair Housing Partnership
Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath)
Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center
Eliot Community Human Services
Elizabeth Freeman Center
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
Fall River Confronting Discrimination Committee
Fall River Housing Joint Tenant Council
Family Promise Metrowest

FamilyAid Boston
Father Bill's & MainSpring
Fenway Community Development Corporation
Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
Framingham Public Health Department
Greater Boston Labor Council
Greater Boston Legal Services
Greater Framingham Community Church
Greater Lawrence Community Action Cncl
Grow A Strong Family
HarborCOV: Communities Overcoming Violence
Harvard Legal Aid Bureau
Heading Home
Health Care For All
Health Resources in Action
Heisler, Feldman & McCormick
Holland & Knight LLP
HomeStart
Homes for Families
Horizons for Homeless Children
Housing Families
Immigrant Service Providers Group/Health
Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion
Institute for Community Health
Inter-Church Council of Grt New Bedford
Jane Doe, Inc.
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston
Jewish Family & Children's Service
JP Progressives
Justice Center of Southeast Massachusetts
La Collaborativa
La Comunidad
Latinos Unidos En Massachusetts
Law Office of Laura M. Unflat
Lawyers Clearinghouse
Lawyers for Civil Rights in Boston
Lawrence Community Works
League of Women Voters Massachusetts
Legal Services Center of Harvard Law Sch

LEO, Inc.
Lexington Housing Partnership Board
LivableStreets
Local Initiatives Support Corpor - Boston
Lynn Community Health Center
Lynn Housing Authority & Neighborhood Development
Lynn United for Change
Maloney Properties, Inc.
Mandela Residents Cooperative Association, Inc.
Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants
Mass Alliance of Portuguese Speakers
Mass Appleseed Center for Law & Justice
Mass Association for Mental Health
Mass Association of Community Development Corporation
Mass Association of Community Health Workers
Mass Bar Association
Mass Catholic Conference
Mass Coalition for the Homeless
Mass Communities Action Network
Mass Fair Housing Center
Mass General Brigham
Mass General Hospital Center for Community Health Improvement
Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance, Inc.
Mass Law Reform Institute
Mass League of Community Health Cntrs
Mass LGBTQ Bar Association
Mass Political Cooperative
Mass Public Health Association
Mass Senior Action Council
Mass Smart Growth Alliance
Mass Teachers Association
Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants
Mayor Gary Christenson, Malden
Mayor Katjana Ballantyne, Somerville
Mayor Carlo DeMaria, Everett
Mayor Jared Nicholson, Lynn
Mayor Joseph M. Petty, Worcester
Mayor Robert F. Sullivan, Brockton

Medical-Legal Partnership| Boston
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
Metro Housing| Boston
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Metropolitan Mayors Coalition
MetroWest Legal Services
Middlesex Community College
NAACP New Bedford Branch
National Association of Social Workers,
Mass. Chapter
National Lawyers Guild, Mass. Chapter
Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America
NeighborWorks Housing Solutions
New Bedford Community Health Center
Northampton Human Rights Commission
Northampton Survival Center
Northeast Justice Center
NuLawLabs at Northeastern University School of Law
Nuestra Comunidad Development Corp
One Family
Open Sky, Worcester
Our Father's House
Pioneer Valley Workers Center
Preservation of Affordable Housing, Inc.
Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts
Progressive Mass
Project Hope
Public Health Institute of Western Mass
Public Interest Law Foundation at Boston College Law
School
Regional Housing Network of Mass
Residents Council for the Senior & Disabled Tenants
of Quincy Housing Authority
Right to the City Boston
Rosie's Place
Roxbury Community College
Samaritans Southcoast
Senior Residents Council
ServiceNet
Solidarity Lowell
Somerville Dept. of Veterans' Services Director, Ted
Louis Jacques
Somerville Homeless Coalition
Society of St. Vincent de Paul Boston
Solidarity Lowell
South Middlesex Opportunity Council
Springfield Dementia Friendly Coalition
Springfield No One Leaves
Springfield Partners for Community Action, Inc.
St. Francis House
Stop Bullying Coalition
Temple Sinai of Sharon
Tenant Advocacy Project at Harvard Law School
The Neighborhood Developers
The Second Step
Three Pyramids
Town Manager of Amherst, Paul Bockelman
Town Manager of Danvers, Steve Bartha
Town Manager of Randolph, Brian Howard
Trinity Financial
Urban Edge
UNITE HERE Local 26
United Food and Commercial Union Local 1445
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack
Valley
University of Massachusetts School of Law -
Dartmouth
Veterans Legal Services
Volunteers of America
Way Finders
Western Massachusetts Network to End
Homelessness
WATCH Community Development Corporation
WinnCompanies
Womanshelter/ Compañeras
Women's Bar Association
Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts
Worcester County Food Bank
Y2Y Network
YWCA Cambridge
123 Up And Adam