



Boston City Council

BENJAMIN WEBER
Councilor - District 6

March 27, 2024

To: Massachusetts Joint Committee on Ways and Means

The Honorable Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Chair
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Re: H.4360 and S.864, An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Chair Rodrigues, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

I submit this written testimony to express my support for H.4360 and S.864, An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts.

Last Thursday, March 21st the Boston City Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development hosted a hearing on exploring a right to counsel pilot for tenants facing eviction in the City of Boston, which I sponsored alongside Committee Chair Liz Breadon and Council President Ruthzee Louijeune. The hearing, which lasted over three and a half hours, highlighted the need to give legal representation to tenants who need it most and who often enter housing court without an advocate. Their lack of understanding or familiarity with the legal system leaves these tenants vulnerable to signing away their rights in mediation. As you are well aware, 90% of landlords in housing court have an attorney present while only 3% of tenants have legal representation. This power imbalance is contributing to our housing crisis, leaving our most vulnerable tenants, many with children, out on the streets or in our shelter system, which is costing the state money.

A 2020 Boston Bar Foundation report found that for every dollar spent on legal aid in eviction and foreclosure matters the state could save \$2.69 on costs associated with emergency shelters, health care, and other services as the result of an eviction - and that is a conservative estimate.

The time to act on this issue is now, which is why today the Boston City Council unanimously adopted a resolution I put forward in support of passing H.4360 and S.864. The need of our residents requires state and city officials to work together. If the bills pass, it will take five years to fully implement and I hope the city will play a role in ensuring the bill's public policy goals are met after passage.

I applaud this committee for holding a hearing regarding access to counsel, and urge the Legislature to enact this legislation which will help many of our renters and small landlords across Massachusetts.

Sincerely,

Boston City Councilor Benjamin Weber, District 6