



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

December 9, 2024

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

RE: Request to include \$5 million for Access to Counsel Program in the Proposed FY26 House 1 Budget (Line Item 0321-1800)

Dear Governor Healey:

I am writing to you today as Mayor of the City of Somerville to first thank you for including \$3.5 million in your House 1 FY25 Budget and second to urge you to include \$5 million for an Access to Counsel program in the FY26 budget. As you know, \$2.5 million in funding was ultimately approved in the FY25 budget to launch an Access to Counsel program in Massachusetts. This would not have happened without your leadership and your recognition of the critical role that attorneys play in keeping our most vulnerable residents housed.

Multiple studies, including the Greater Boston Housing Report Card, have clearly documented that there is insufficient purpose-built affordable housing to meet the incredible need for such housing in Massachusetts. For this reason, in addition to building more affordable housing and increasing tenants access to housing vouchers, tenants must be able to remain in their homes whenever possible—rehousing almost always entails finding rentals at greatly increased monthly costs.

The City of Somerville opened an Office of Housing Stability (OHS) in 2018. OHS receives approximately 1300-1500 requests for help annually from housing instable Somerville households. OHS has determined that the best way to keep tenants housed is through a combination of access to flexible rental assistance, robust legal services representation and strong case management. Each of these components of this housing stability model is critical to the outcome of preventing homelessness.

As has been so well documented through extensive research, the consequences of eviction are incredibly far-reaching for those evicted families negatively effecting job retention, academic achievement, and physical and mental health. Your administration recognized the critical importance of a new Access to Counsel program, **which provides full representation to tenants**, by seeking funding for the first year of Access to Counsel in FY25. We implore you to continue the progress made in FY25 by providing \$5 million for this critical program in FY26. The Massachusetts

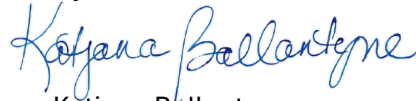


Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) has had approximately six months to develop a new program and utilize the \$2.5 million allocated in FY25. To maintain attorneys and paralegals hired in FY25 for a twelve-month period in FY26 will require approximately \$5 million in the FY26 appropriation. We also urge you to consider this a permanent program, rather than a pilot, consistent with your FY25 House I request.

We know that you will be tasked with making many important and very difficult decisions when crafting your House 1 FY26 budget. We urge you to continue your robust support of systems necessary to prevent evictions – one of the best ways to continue this support is by continuing funding for Access to Counsel in FY26.

All my best.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katjana Ballantyne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
City of Somerville