

Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants
784 Washington St, Suite 504
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December 1, 2023

The Honorable Maura Healey
Governor of Massachusetts
State House Room 360

Secretary Matthew Gorzkowicz
Executive Office of Administration and Finance
State House Room 373

RE: FY25 Budget and Investing in Public Housing Communities

Dear Governor Healey and Secretary Gorzkowicz,

The Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants, a statewide organization that advocates on behalf of public housing residents, is excited to work with you, Secretary Augustus, and your administration to strengthen state public housing and to pass the Affordable Homes Act, H. 4138. Public housing provides permanently affordable housing to extremely low-income vulnerable seniors, people with disabilities and families and is critical to preserve.

We also want to thank you for elevating housing and creating an Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). Mass Union has met with Secretary Augustus several times and we appreciate his listening to the concerns of residents. As he told a room full of over 100 public housing resident leaders at Mass Union's Fall Convention last month: Massachusetts is fortunate, unlike other states, to have 44,000 units of state public housing, but this housing has lacked investment for over 30-40 years and it is time to make up for that.

We urge your administration to protect state public housing and the people who live in it by:

- 1. Increasing the Public Housing Operating Subsidy Line Item (7004-9005) to \$189 million.** Housing authorities have been underfunded for decades. While the Affordable Homes Act proposes a significant capital infusion, limited operating funds have prevented housing authorities from providing basic maintenance and effectively turning over vacant units. In 2005, [A Study of the Appropriate Operating Costs for State-Funded Public Housing in Massachusetts](#), found that annual operating appropriations should increase to about \$115 million. This study is over 20 years old. Adjusted for inflation it has been estimated that the subsidy needs to increase to \$189 million. Last year, the Legislature increased the Public Housing Operating line item to \$107 million. We urge you to raise the operating subsidy to what is truly needed to preserve public housing.
- 2. Providing Technical Assistance for Tenants Facing Redevelopment in the amount of \$1 million.** Section 36 of the H. 4138, the Affordable Homes Act, includes a critical provision ensuring that when redevelopment happens, tenant rights must be continued and housing authorities must ensure that tenants have technical assistance. We are excited to advance this provision with you. These deals are complicated and tenants need assistance to navigate the process. When Secretary Augustus spoke at the Mass Union's Fall Convention he told residents that as EOHLC sees projects moving forward with private

developers, EOHLC wants to make sure that that residents are at the table from the beginning of redevelopment, that their voices are heard, and that they are provided with technical assistance so that residents are not outgunned. To ensure that technical assistance is available to tenants, we urge that the Governor establish a new line item, a Technical Assistance Fund for Public Housing Residents, in the amount of \$1 million and that Mass Union works with EOHLC to build and train technical assistance teams that can be deployed to residents around the state facing redevelopment.

3. Increasing the Public Housing Reform Line (7004-9007) to \$2.3 million.

As residents, we know the challenges that our communities face. Our leaders hold housing authorities accountable while also working collaboratively to set up good programs and policies. But tenant organizations need support. Currently the state provides \$6/unit per year to local tenant organizations (LTOs), while the federal government provides \$25/unit. Tenants and housing authorities alike agree that increased funding is needed for LTOs. We urge you to support tenant participation by including an earmark of \$1 million in this line item for democratically elected tenant organizations.

4. Start to Phase in an Access to Counsel Program

Every week, Mass Union receives calls from tenants facing eviction. Some of these tenants are facing eviction because they are trying to make change in their community. Others are facing eviction for non-payment when the real issue is that their rent has been miscalculated. They go to court unrepresented and are up against housing authorities who have lawyers. They sign agreements that they don't understand and that are unsustainable. Mass Union joins over 240 organizations in urging you to include language to establish an Access to Counsel Program and funding of \$7 million to phase in an Access to Counsel Program for low-income tenants and low-income owner occupants in eviction proceedings.

Thank you for your work to protect the Commonwealth's public housing and the people living there. We hope you will continue to come to our communities and we look forward to working with your administration.

Thank you,

Dave Underhill, President Mass Union Board
Fall River

Cc: Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll
Secretary Ed Augustus, Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities
Kate Cook, Chief of Staff, Office of Governor Maura Healey
Juan Gallego, Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Governor Driscoll
Eric Shupin, Chief of Policy at Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities
Christopher Marino, Assistant Secretary for Budget, Administration and Finance
Danielle Cerny, Chief of Staff, Administration and Finance