



Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants
784 Washington Street, Suite 504
Dorchester, MA 02124

December 3, 2024

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: FY26 Budget and Investing in Public Housing Communities

Dear Governor Healey and Secretary Gorzkowicz,

The Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants, a statewide organization run by and for public housing residents, would like to reiterate our appreciation for your support for public housing in the Affordable Homes Act and the FY25 budget. As you develop a proposed 2026 Fiscal Year budget, we urge you to capitalize on this momentum and continue to protect and preserve Massachusetts' public assets, including its public housing portfolio, which provides a stable home for many of our Commonwealth's most vulnerable seniors, veterans, families, persons with disabilities, immigrants and others. The waiting list for this housing is historically long and not likely to shrink. Now is the time to continue affirming your commitment to residents who need housing.

Mass Union asks that the Administration provide these three key investments in your FY26 budget proposal.

- 1. Increase the Public Housing Operating Subsidy Line Item (7004-9005) to \$153 million.** As you know, funding levels for state public housing are far below those provided by the federal government. We know that we cannot reach parity with HUD's current funding level in just one budget year, but we ask that state leaders do so *within five years*. Mass Union and our partners calculate that \$40 million increases per year for five years would achieve this milestone. Mass Union, with MassNAHRO, CHAPA and GBIO, respectfully request that the Administration propose \$153 million for the public housing operating subsidy in FY26. *As tenants, the chronically underfunded operating subsidy has had huge impacts on our lives.* We too often live with mold, rats, bedbugs, broken elevators, sewage problems and more. Our proposal to achieve funding parity with current HUD levels would allow us to live with dignity.
- 2. Provide Technical Assistance for Tenants Facing Redevelopment in the amount of \$350,000.** Mass Union is very grateful that the Affordable Homes Act provides protections for tenants undergoing redevelopment with private partners. As you know, this is an increasingly common practice and these protections are crucial. However, without

funding for organizers, lawyers, architects and others, the protections will only go so far. Redevelopment is incredibly complicated and meaningful tenant engagement in the process requires support from experts. A relatively modest investment at \$350,000—less than the cost of building one unit of housing—can start to provide tenants with the funding needed to improve redevelopments across the state by ensuring that we have a meaningful say in decisions. *We live in housing 24/7 and bring essential lived experience to the discussion. This input must not be sidelined or tokenized: we need a real, meaningful voice.* To ensure that technical assistance is available to tenants, we urge that the Governor allocate \$350,000 for a Technical Assistance Fund for Public Housing Residents 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. Ensure that the Access to Counsel Program in Evictions Is Permanent and Stable and Include \$5 Million in the Proposed FY26 Budget (Line Item 0321-1800).** 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 thanking you for including a dedicated line-item 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. *Now, it is critical to set Access to Counsel up for success and to set in motion a framework for a permanent, stable, and sustainable program.* We urge you to return to that vision, remove the word "pilot" from the line item and propose a full 12-months of funding at \$5 million so that legal services can sustain the capacity that it is building now.

Thank you again 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
Tenant Leader, Fall River

Sarah Byrnes
Executive Director, Mass Union

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