



**Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants, Inc.**

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May 9, 2023

Honorable James Eldridge  
Senate Chair  
Joint Committee on Judiciary

Honorable Michael Day  
House Chair  
Joint Committee on Judiciary

**In Support of H. 1731 - An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts (Rep. David Rogers and Rep. Michael Day)**

Chair Eldridge and Chair Day and Members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. On behalf of the Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants, **we urge the Judiciary Committee to report favorably H.1731, An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts.**

My name is Renee Spencer. I am a public housing tenant and commissioner in Wellesley and a board member of the Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants (Mass Union).

Mass Union is a statewide organization of public housing residents and resident organizations. We help tenants form tenant groups and improve their housing and their communities. Our members are from all over the state: East Boston, Quincy, Somerville, Stoneham, Springfield, and Worcester, to list a few. Every day our office gets calls from people who are facing eviction and can't get legal representation.

About 12 years ago, I was evicted by the Wellesley Housing Authority for non-payment of rent. My son was away at college. I had been a tenant for 32 years and very active in public service in Wellesley and in helping other tenants in my community. Despite working two jobs, I fell behind on rent. Then one day, I came home to find an eviction notice on my door. I will never forget this.

The following week, I went into court alone with over \$500 in cash in my pocket to put towards a payment plan with the housing authority. I thought that given my long history as a responsible tenant I would be able to negotiate a payment plan. I was wrong.

The housing authority had a lawyer - I didn't. In court, I tried to explain my long history with the housing authority and that for over 30 years I had been a good tenant. The judge urged the housing authority's attorney to negotiate with me because I had come to court with money to put towards a payment plan. But the attorney refused. I was evicted.

I felt devastated and after the initial shock wore off, I packed most of my things into my car and moved in with my sister a couple days later. I was homeless for four years, staying with friends or family. It was embarrassing, and I walked away from public service and from helping tenants because of the trauma.

Later though, my eviction motivated me to help other tenants. I am back as a tenant in Wellesley public housing and was elected as commissioner for Wellesley Housing Authority board. I also am a member of the League of Women Voters, Town Meeting Member, board member on Wellesley Friendly Aid, and board member on Mass Union Public Housing Tenants.

In my Mass Union work, I see the difference a lawyer and the right legal resources can make. It feels like when you are by yourself in an eviction, you don't have a chance at all. **Having a lawyer on your side is the difference between staying in your home or being forced to leave without your control.**

This past weekend, over 150 tenants gathered to attend Mass Union's Spring Convention and legal help matters to our members. We are grateful for your leadership on this issue. Please report H.1731 out favorably. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Renee Spencer

Assistant Treasurer, Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants