



Wednesday, September 27, 2023

Chair Edwards, Chair Arciero, and Members of the Joint Committee on Housing:

My name is Jonathan Cohn, and I am the policy director at Progressive Massachusetts. We are a statewide, multi-issue, grassroots membership organization focused on fighting for policy that would make our Commonwealth more equitable, just, sustainable, and democratic.

We see it all the time in polls, we hear it on the doors, and we see it in the data: Massachusetts has a housing crisis. More and more residents are unable to afford to live in our commonwealth anymore, priced out from one community to another and then out entirely, or face severe housing instability.

We need a comprehensive approach to the housing crisis, and strong protections for tenants must be a part of it. **We urge you to give a favorable report to S.864/H.1731: An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts.**

These bills would provide legal representation for low-income tenants and low-income owner-occupants in eviction proceedings. The eviction moratorium that the Legislature passed earlier in the pandemic was a vital lifeline for so many, but eviction filings have now been climbing past what they were in 2019, pre-pandemic. Tenants enter such eviction proceedings at a major disadvantage: according to FY2022 Trial Court data, while 86% of landlords are represented, only 11.5% of tenants are represented. Tenants facing eviction are disproportionately poor, female, and BIPOC, and evictions can have lasting negative impacts on physical and mental health.

Connecticut, Maryland, and Washington have already passed Right to Counsel policies, and Massachusetts should join them.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Cohn
Policy Director
Progressive Massachusetts