

September 27, 2023

Honorable Lydia Edwards  
Senate Chair  
Joint Committee on Housing

Honorable James Arciero  
House Chair  
Joint Committee on Housing

**In Support of S. 864 - An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts (Senator DiDomenico)**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Renee Spencer. I am a public housing tenant in Wellesley and Resident Board Member on the Wellesley Housing Authority Board.

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 I was 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 did not.

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 housing authority's 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, and a board member on Wellesley Friendly Aid.

I know the difference a lawyer 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.**

We need to establish an Access to Counsel program in Massachusetts. Please report S. 864 out favorably. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Renee Spencer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Renee Spencer  
Wellesley, Massachusetts