



## Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Office of the Bishop *The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Bishop*

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Charlie Baker  
The Honorable Karen E. Spilka  
The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo  
The Honorable Michael J. Rodrigues  
The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz

Massachusetts State House  
24 Beacon Street  
Office of the Governor, Room 280  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker and Members of the Legislature,

The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, composed of 180 congregations in eastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod and the Islands, stands with the Massachusetts Right to Counsel Coalition. We urge the Governor and the Massachusetts Legislature to quickly pass emergency legislation to create a right to counsel pilot project and to fund it so that we can protect those who are most vulnerable during this COVID crisis.

Our cathedral in Boston (in Rep. Michlewitz's district) has been providing meals and respite for unhoused and unstably-housed neighbors three days a week throughout the COVID-19 crisis. We have seen many new people fall into homelessness and prayed with countless others worried about eviction. The psychic cost of this fear is hard to put into words. Similar work has been carried out by our parishes in Chelsea, in Lawrence, and in several other communities which have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic.

Evictions traumatize children, seniors, people with disabilities, immigrant families, and working people. Eviction often leads to countless other ills, such as addiction, mental health problems, domestic violence, and developmental setbacks for children.

In Massachusetts, while 93% of tenants facing eviction are unrepresented, 78% of landlords have a lawyer in court. We must change this imbalance. When the eviction moratorium ends, we may face tens of thousands of evictions. We must use every tool we can to prevent mass evictions and stabilize housing.

At our baptisms, Episcopalians pledge to work for justice and defend the dignity of all people. The right to counsel makes our Commonwealth more just and prevents countless families from the indignity of eviction. We applaud our Massachusetts U.S. House of Representatives Delegation for standing with the Right to Counsel Coalition.

It is urgent to pass S. 2785 and use the federal COVID relief funding provided to the Commonwealth to fund a right to counsel pilot program in communities hardest hit by COVID.

Sincerely,

The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Bishop Diocesan, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts  
The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, Bishop Suffragan, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts  
The Very Rev. Amy E. McCreath, Dean, Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston