

Principles to Guide the Reconciliation of the Right to Counsel Bills

Three Right to Counsel bills have been filed for the 2019-20 Massachusetts legislative session. These bills were drafted several years ago. Since that time, New York City and others have passed similar legislation. Members of the Massachusetts Right to Counsel Coalition have reviewed these bills, considered lessons learned in Massachusetts and NYC, and developed the following principles to advance a legislative campaign for justice in evictions.

Housing Stabilization and Homelessness Prevention

Whereas housing is a basic fundamental human need, access to legal and housing stability services are necessary to prevent homelessness, stem the tide of displacement, and stop unjust evictions.

Fairness in the Legal System

The vast majority of tenants who face eviction are unrepresented. In contrast, most landlords are represented by counsel. The result is a process that can be unbalanced and unfair.

Assistance Can Make a Difference

Access to the right assistance can prevent families from the trauma of eviction and displacement, and create a path to housing stability.

Upstream Solutions

Pre-court eviction help, proactive education and outreach, and housing stabilization are needed to prevent tenants from losing subsidized housing. "Upstreaming" will save landlords, tenants, and courts time and money and better facilitate the resolution of cases.

Community Engagement

Development of an implementation plan must provide a process to allow for input from all stakeholders on the multitude of issues to consider.

Build Upon and Strengthen the Existing Institutions

Implementation must build upon the work of existing organizations with a proven track record of effectiveness in the areas of landlord/tenant legal assistance, homelessness prevention and housing stabilization.

Collaboration

Collaboration is needed among legal services, social services, community organizers, municipalities, courts, educational institutions, and other organizations to create a continuum of impactful assistance.

Funded with New Money

The right must be funded with new money and cannot be effective by reallocating existing legal assistance and housing stabilization resources.

Outcomes

Oversight and assessment of the program should be designed in a way to insure measurable outcomes, data collection, and public reporting.

Tied to Other Systemic Housing Solutions

The right to counsel is one component of a necessary housing stability strategy that must include other initiatives to preserve and expand the supply of affordable housing for low and moderate income people.

The Growing List of Supports for Right to Counsel in Eviction Cases

Action, Inc.
AIDS Action/Fenway Health
Alliance of Cambridge Tenants
Allston/Brighton Community Develop Corp
Arise for Social Justice
Beacon Communities
Beacon Residential Management
Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority
Black Economic Justice Institute
Boston Bar Association
Boston Tenant Coalition
Casa Myrna
Cathedral Church of St. Paul
Chelsea Collaborative
Chelsea City Manager, Tom G. Ambrosino
Chelsea Police Department
Children's HealthWatch
Children's Services of Roxbury
Chinese Progressive Association
Citizens' Housing and Planning Association
City Life/Vida Urbana
City Mission Boston
City of Boston
City of Cambridge Resolution
City Northampton Resolution
City of Springfield Resolution
Community Action Agency of Somerville
Community Action Pioneer Valley
Community Health Network for North Central Mass
De Novo Center for Justice and Healing
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
FamilyAid Boston
Father Bill's & MainSpring
Fenway Community Development Corporation
Food Bank of Western Mass
Greater Boston Legal Services
Greater Lawrence Community Action Council
Grow A Strong Family
Harvard Legal Aid Bureau
Heisler, Feldman & McCormick
Holland & Knight LLP
HomeStart
Homes for Families
Housing Families
Immigrant Service Providers Group/Health
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Justice Center of Southeast Mass
Law Office of Laura M. Unflat
Lawrence Community Works
Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School
Lexington Housing Partnership Board
Lynn United for Change
Maloney Properties, Inc.
Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants
Mass Assoc of Community Development Corp
Mass Association of Community Health Workers
Mass Communities Action Network
Mass Fair Housing Center
Mass Senior Action Council
Mass Coalition for the Homeless
Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance
Mass Law Reform Institute
Mass Public Health Association
Mass Smart Growth Alliance
Mass Teachers Association
Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants
Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone, Somerville
Mayor Marty Walsh, Boston
Medical-Legal Partnership|Boston
Metro Housing|Boston
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
MetroWest Legal Services
National Assoc of Social Workers, Mass. Chapter
National Lawyers Guild, Mass. Chapter
NeighborWorks Housing Solutions
Northampton Survival Center
Northeast Justice Center
NuLawLabs Northeastern University Law School
One Family
Progressive Democrats of Mass
Project Hope
Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts
Right to the City Boston
Rosie's Place
ServiceNet
Springfield Dementia Friendly Coalition
Springfield No One Leaves
Springfield Partners for Community Action, Inc.
Society of St. Vincent de Paul Boston
Solidarity Lowell
Stop Bullying Coalition
Temple Sinai of Sharon
Tenant Advocacy Project at Harvard Law School
The Neighborhood Developers
Three Pyramids
Trinity Financial
United Food and Commercial Union Local 1445
United Way of Mass Bay and Merrimack Valley
Way Finders
Western Mass Network to End Homelessness
WinnCompanies
Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts
123 Up And Adam, Inc.