



VOAMASS

Phil Chadwick  
Chair

Charles E. Gagnon  
Chief Executive Officer

May 4, 2023

Honorable James Eldridge

Honorable Michael Day

Senate Chair

House Chair

Joint Committee on Judiciary

Joint Committee on Judiciary

**Re: Testimony in Support of *An Act promoting housing stability and homelessness prevention in Massachusetts*, H. 1731 (Rep. Dave Rogers and Rep. Michael Day)**

On behalf of VOAMASS we join with the Right to Counsel Coalition made up of over 230 diverse organizations including property owners, racial justice groups, municipal leaders, and public health members, to urge members of the Judiciary Committee to report **H. 1731 (Rep. Rogers and Rep. Day)**, *An Act promoting housing stability and homelessness prevention in Massachusetts*, out favorably.

H. 1731 would provide for access to legal representation for low income, our Veterans and vulnerable **tenants** and **owner occupants** of 1-3 family homes, which is their sole dwelling, in eviction cases.

As an organization that works with the hardest to serve, we understand the importance of sustained housing. VOAMASS provides behavioral treatment through a distinct patient-centered, whole-person care that is trauma-informed, culturally competent, with a holistic approach. This model is at the heart of an integrated care framework, delivered by a licensed and vetted multi-disciplinary team serving high-risk populations, including homeless, our Veterans, chronically unemployed, low-income, and BIPOC communities. We here at VOAMASS specialize in placing and supporting our Veterans into permanent housing with wrap-around services. This whole-person approach is a central strategy for our Veterans to successfully achieve housing stability, preserving their housing and avoiding experiencing homelessness again.

The difference legal help can make is clear, but a more comprehensive strategy on housing stability is urgently needed. Under a **temporary** expanded legal assistance project in Massachusetts, 90% of cases that received legal representation were successful with the tenancy

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being preserved or the tenant having additional time to move out. We should not lose the gains that have been made through this project. The value of full representation is clear.

Recently, Connecticut passed a statewide right to counsel program for eviction cases and allocated \$20 million from American Rescue Plan funding to launch it. Washington state and Maryland likewise passed a right to counsel program in their states.

Massachusetts should not be left behind. We urge your committee to report H. 1731 out favorably

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles E. Gagnon".

Charles E. Gagnon  
President and CEO

**Care Today.** *Opportunity Tomorrow.*