



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE BUD L. WILLIAMS

11TH HAMPDEN DISTRICT

HOUSE CHAIR, JOINT COMMITTEE on RACIAL EQUITY, CIVIL RIGHTS, and INCLUSION

August 11, 2021

Senator John Keenan, Chair
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 413-F

Representative James Arciero, Chair
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 38

Dear Chair Arciero and Chair Keenan:

We are writing as members of the Western Massachusetts delegation to urge your favorable report on the [Act to Prevent COVID-19 Evictions and Foreclosures and Promote an Equitable Housing Recovery](#) ("COVID-19 Housing Equity Bill" H.1434/S.891). We ask you to act on an expedited basis in the face of the ongoing public health crisis facing our constituents.

Over 2,700 evictions have been filed for non-payment of rent in Western Massachusetts alone since the lifting of the state eviction moratorium last October. Across every county, the **threat of eviction looms large for thousands of our constituents: 2,036 in Hampden County, 354 in Berkshire County, 207 in Hampshire County and 139 Franklin County.** Additionally, **585 properties in Western Massachusetts are under the threat of foreclosure** without any law, state or federal, providing any protection for our homeowners.

As the more aggressive Delta variant surges and [COVID numbers tick up across the Commonwealth](#), we believe it is the state's duty to act immediately to protect our constituents. The COVID-19 Housing Equity Bill will provide that protection by:

- ensuring landlords cooperate with rental assistance programs before resorting to action;
- requiring the state to simplify the application process for rent and mortgage assistance;
- protecting the most vulnerable tenants from forced removal for COVID-19 debts;
- requiring lenders to offer sustainable forbearance plans to homeowners and to protect homeowners whose forbearance plans are ending;
- and temporarily pausing foreclosures and no-fault evictions during the COVID-19 recovery period.

The Western region's largest administrator of rental assistance, Way Finders, reports receiving 400-500 applications for rental assistance per week, as many as 100 per day, with an application processing time of 4-5 weeks. While all of our region's rental assistance administrators are working untold hours with tireless commitment, state action is necessary to create the housing stability we all seek on behalf of our constituents; we must take this crisis out of the courts to create equitable access to the rental assistance that is now abundant.

Our Western Massachusetts constituents and leaders from every walk of our communities, serving tens of thousands of our constituents across the region, shared their sense of urgency in [this letter](#) to the Legislature and the Governor (see list of Western MA signers below). From every community college to every MassHire Career Center to every United Way to our major health systems and dozens of our front-line providers, the call for action is clear.

As the [White House](#) put it: "No one in America should be evicted when federal funds are available, in the hands of state and local government, to pay back rent due."

To keep our constituents safely housed, we respectfully urge a timely and favorable report on this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service.

Respectfully,

Bud L. Williams

Bud Williams
Eleventh Hampden

Patricia Duffy
Fifth Hampden

Smitty Pignatelli
Fourth Berkshire

John Barrett
First Berkshire

Tricia Farley-Bouvier
Third Berkshire

Orlando Ramos
Ninth Hampden

Natalie Blais
First Franklin

Carlos González
Tenth Hampden

Lindsay Sabadosa
First Hampshire

Daniel Carey,
Second Hampshire

Paul Mark
Second Berkshire

Susannah Whipps
Second Franklin

Mindy Domb
Third Hampshire

Jake Oliveira
Seventh Hampden

Jo Comerford
Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester

Anne Gobi
Worcester, Hampshire, Hampden and Middlesex

Adam Gomez
Hampden

Adam Hinds
Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden

Eric Lesser
First Hampden and Hampshire

John Velis
Second Hampden and Hampshire

Please see below for local officials and organizational signatories in support of this bill.

Western MA Organizations and Officials signed on to the [Homes for All MA letter](#) urging passage of the COVID-19 Housing Equity bill:

North Adams Mayor Tom Bernard
Easthampton Mayor Nicole LaChapelle
Northampton Mayor David Narkewicz
Pittsfield Mayor Linda Tyer
Greenfield Mayor Roxann Wedegartner
Springfield City Council (unanimous resolution in support)
Amherst Town Manager Paul Bockelman
Amherst Survival Center
Arise for Social Justice
Baystate Health
Behavioral Health Network
Berkshire Community Action Council
Berkshire Community College
Berkshire Housing Development Services
Berkshire Immigrant Center
Berkshire United Way
Community Development
Center Human Development
Community Action Pioneer Valley
Construct, Inc. (Great Barrington)
Cooley Dickinson Hospital
Craig's Doors
DIAL/SELF Youth and Community Services
Eliot-CHS Homeless Services
Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
Gandara Center
Greenfield Community College
Grow Food Northampton
Holyoke Community College
Louison House (North Adams)
MassHire Berkshire Career Center
MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center
MassHire Holyoke Career Center
MassHire Springfield Career Center
New England Farm Workers Council
Northampton Survival Center
Northern Berkshire United Way
Public Health Institute of Western MA
Tapestry Health
Springfield No One Leaves
Springfield Partners for Community Action
Springfield Technical Community College
Square One
United Way of the Pioneer Valley
United Way of the Franklin -
Hampshire Region
Valley Corporation
Valley Opportunity Council
Western Massachusetts Network to End
Homelessness