

Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness Legislative Priorities 2023–2024

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness seeks to prevent and end homelessness with a Housing First approach that centers racial equity. Towards that end, the Network's top legislative priorities include:

An act establishing a bill of rights for individuals experiencing homelessness

([HD.107](#)) *Sponsors: Reps. Smitty Pignatelli and Frank Moran*

This bill would recognize and affirm various rights of people experiencing homelessness, such as the rights to move freely in public spaces, confidentiality of records, privacy of property, register to vote and vote, etc., and would provide additional civil rights protections for people experiencing homelessness.

An act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts

([HD.3657/SD.1082](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Dave Rogers; Sen. Sal DiDomenico*

Right now, 9 out of 10 tenants face eviction unrepresented. In contrast, most landlords are represented by counsel. This legislation would establish an Access to Counsel program to provide legal representation to eligible tenants and owner-occupants in eviction proceedings.

[Factsheet](#)

An act to guarantee first right of tenant's refusal (TOPA)

([HD.3645/SD.2238](#)) *Sponsors: Reps. Jay Livingstone and Rob Consalvo; Sens. Pat Jehlen and Adam Gomez*

The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) would allow cities and towns a local option to provide tenants in multi-family buildings the right to match a third-party offer when their homes are being sold. Tenants can designate their rights to a non-profit or local housing authority, or partner with an affordable housing purchaser. TOPA is revenue neutral, does not regulate sales prices, and explicitly exempts small owners. [Factsheet](#)

An act granting a local option for a real estate transfer fee to fund affordable housing

([HD.2857/SD.1982](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Mike Connolly; Sen. Jo Comerford*

A local option real estate transfer fee would be an effective, efficient and equitable tool for raising necessary revenue for affordable housing in communities across the Commonwealth. This legislation will allow municipalities to place a transfer fee on high-end real estate sales and use this money to create affordable housing in their communities. [Factsheet](#)

An act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants

([HD.3953/SD.1818](#)) *Sponsors: Reps. Dave Rogers and Samantha Montaño; Sens. Pat Jehlen and Adam Gomez*

This bill would repeal the ban on local rent control and enable municipalities to enact rent control and just cause ordinances. [Factsheet](#)

An act establishing a Massachusetts foreclosure prevention program

([HD1551/SD923](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Christine Barber; Sen. Adam Gomez*

This bill would establish a statewide Foreclosure Prevention program to require servicers and homeowners to participate in pre-foreclosure conferences to explore alternatives to foreclosure.

[Factsheet](#)

An act to provide identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness

([HD.3043/SD.1243](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Jim O'Day; Sen. Robyn Kennedy*

The Mass ID access bill (a.k.a. Everyone Needs ID bill) would allow access to standard Mass IDs, not REAL ID Act-compliant Mass IDs, for which residents must provide additional verifications that meet federal standards. Versions of this bill were passed unanimously by the Senate during the past three sessions.

An act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness

([HD.1962/SD.185](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Marjorie Decker; Sen. Adam Gomez*

This omnibus legislation would address access and administrative issues for families and children seeking to access or retain emergency assistance shelter and HomeBASE rehousing benefits.

An act to create and implement a Massachusetts flexible supportive housing subsidy pool program

([HD.216/SD.674](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Joan Meschino; Sen. Brendan Crighton*

84% of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness who receive supportive services and a housing voucher remain housed one year later. This bill will bring to scale supportive housing programs by braiding public and private funding into a single, flexible source to meet the needs of vulnerable residents, ensuring equitable distribution of funds and creating housing stability across a continuum of services. [Factsheet](#)

Additional legislative priorities include:

An act codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program

([HD.3349/SD.682](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Adrian Madaro; Sen. Joan Lovely*

The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) is the largest state-funded rental assistance program in the country, assisting nearly 10,000 households with low- and moderate-incomes. However, the program lacks the statutory grounding and organizational structure for needed for oversight and growth. This bill would incorporate the core rules of MRVP into the general laws, rather than re-establishing it each year through the annual budget and would provide additional important program improvements.

An act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults
([HD.1964/SD.1169](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Marjorie Decker; Sen. Brendan Crighton*

This bill would put the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) homelessness prevention program into state statute and ensure benefits are available to households earlier in a housing or utility crisis. The bill also seeks to streamline access, improve cross-agency collaboration, and allow households to access up to twelve months of assistance, without arbitrary caps.

An act promoting housing opportunity and mobility through eviction sealing (HOMES)
([HD.3625/SD.1592](#)) *Sponsors: Rep. Mike Moran; Sen. Lydia Edwards*

As soon as an eviction case is filed, a tenant has an eviction record, regardless of whether they did anything wrong or were even evicted. This bill is an important start to protecting tenants from undue harm, while important amendments are necessary to accomplish its intended goals. [Factsheet](#)

An act establishing the healthy homes program

([HD.3864/SD.728](#)) *Sponsors: Reps. Manny Cruz and Shirley Arriaga; Sen. John Keenan*

This legislation will create the Massachusetts Healthy Homes program to improve the quality and safety of thousands of homes across the Commonwealth and to improve the health of its residents. These home improvements are also necessary to safely electrify the homes, as we work to achieve our urgent climate action goals. This investment will improve about 5,000 homes, and over time improve the health of many more thousands of households.

An act to improve the housing development incentive program (HDIP)

([SD.1562](#)) *Sponsor: Sen. Jamie Eldridge*

HDIP provides millions in state tax credits and local tax breaks for developers of market rate and often above market/luxury housing in gateway cities. As rents continue to spike in these cities, HDIP supports only unaffordable housing. This bill would improve HDIP by: adding a share of affordability to the program; directing tax credits to weaker market or distressed areas rather than hot markets; requiring bedroom sizes suitable for families with children; and requiring program transparency and public accountability.

An act protecting equity for homeowners facing foreclosure

([HD.81/SD.291](#)) *Sponsors: Reps. Jeffrey Roy and Tommy Vitolo; Sen. Jo Comerford*

When homeowners fall behind in their property taxes, cities and towns can foreclose on and take ownership of the entire property. Municipalities are then free to sell the property, keeping all of the profits—even if the amount exceeds the back taxes owed. The bill provides that any equity remaining beyond the tax debt will be paid to the homeowner and improves the notice system to warn taxpaying homeowners that they may lose their home due to unpaid taxes.

An act allowing movable tiny houses as permanent residential dwellings and accessory dwelling units (HD.3487/SD.1981) *Sponsors: Rep. Lenny Mirra; Sen. Jake Oliveira*

This bill establishes a new state category for movable tiny houses, affording an additional housing option in local communities. It defines a movable tiny house as a primary dwelling and provides standards and guidelines for municipalities to follow that will make movable tiny homes a viable housing alternative.

An act to increase Regional Transit Accessibility (RTA) in the Commonwealth (HD.2385/SD.1762) *Sponsors: Rep. Natalie Blais; Sen. Susan Moran*

The RTA Advancement bill would improve and expand RTA service to better meet the needs of the diverse regions they serve by: increasing the funding floor for RTAs to support the move towards seven days a week service; create a dedicated fund for RTAs; uplift community needs through an annual RTA Council report; and eliminate profitability as a performance metric for transit agencies.

An act providing affordable and accessible high quality early education and care to promote child development and well-being and support the economy (HD2794/SD667)

Sponsors: Reps. Adrian Madaro and Kenneth Gordon; Sens. Jason Lewis and Susan Moran

This legislation would establish a system of affordable, high-quality early education and care for children from birth through age 5 as well as after-and out-of-school time for children ages 5–12, and for children with special needs through age 15.

An act to lift kids out of deep poverty (HD.507/SD.501)

Sponsors: Rep. Marjorie Decker; Sen. Sal DiDomenico

This bill would raise cash assistance grants for transitional assistance for families with dependent children and emergency aid to elderly, disabled and children by 25% a year until they reach 50% of the federal poverty level, and would increase grants each year to keep pace with inflation.