



Housing First  
for Hampden, Hampshire,  
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

November 14, 2023

The Honorable James Arciero  
Chair, Joint Committee on Housing  
State House, Room 146  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Lydia Edwards  
Chair, Joint Committee on Housing  
State House, Room 413-C  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Testimony in Support of An Act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants (H.2103/S.1299) and An Act to guarantee a tenant's first right of refusal (H.1350/S.888)**

Dear Chair Arciero and Chair Edwards, and Members of the Joint Committee on Housing:

I am pleased to submit this written testimony on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness in support of two key legislative priorities outlined below.

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness ("Network") supports collaborative solutions across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach that centers racial equity. It includes hundreds of partners from every sector who are committed to ensure safe, decent and affordable housing for all in western Massachusetts.

Towards that end, the Network urges the Joint Housing Committee to act as quickly as possible to advance the following bills:

**An Act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants (H.2103/S.1299)**, *Lead Sponsors: Senator Jehlen and Senator Gomez/Representative Rogers and Representative Montaño*

Every day across western Massachusetts, the refrain of skyrocketing rents is a constant one. From Pittsfield to Springfield, and dozens of communities in between, the impact on housing stability is real: eviction filings in western MA are at pre-pandemic levels and climbing ever higher. The number of people seeking rental assistance to stave off eviction is steadily increasing, up to 150 RAFT applications *each day, the highest application rate in the state.*

An Act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants will lift the state's ban on rent control, allowing communities access to this critical tool to keep people in their homes. While the housing bond bill and other initiatives offer the promise of long-term solutions, cities and towns must be afforded every opportunity to act now. The rent control option is one such opportunity. Please give western Massachusetts the chance to use it.

**An Act to guarantee a tenant's first right of refusal (H.1350/S.888)**, *Lead Sponsors: Representatives Consalvo and Livingstone, and Senator Jehlen*

Similarly, An Act to guarantee a tenant's first right of refusal is another such local option our communities deserve.

Western Massachusetts is enduring the same real estate market speculation that pervades the entire Commonwealth: investors, many of whom are from out-of-state, are coming into the region, often buying properties with cash, pushing out affordable housing developers. This bill would allow tenants the right to match an offer made on the property in which they live or designate that right to an affordable housing developer when the property where they live is being sold. This first right of refusal is both just and necessary.


The affordable housing gap in western Massachusetts is astonishing. A recent study by UMass Donahue Institute showed an 11,000 affordable housing unit gap now that is projected to grow to 19,000 by 2025. "There are no affordable places to live" is spoken time and again by housing search workers seeking housing for people who are currently experiencing homelessness or facing the threat of eviction.

Again, it is imperative to provide every opportunity to preserve the affordable housing that exists. Giving our communities this local option is one more critical vehicle for making that happen.

On behalf of the hundreds of partners in the Western Massachusetts Network to Homelessness, I urge you to issue a favorable report for these two bills, **An Act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect (H.2103/S.1299)**, and **An Act to guarantee a tenant's first right of refusal (H.1350/S.888)**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela Schwartz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pamela Schwartz, Director  
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