



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

March 27, 2024

The Honorable Michael J. Rodrigues
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House Room 212, Boston, MA 02108

The Honorable Aaron M. Michlewitz
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means
State House Room 243, Boston, MA 02108

Dear Chair Rodrigues and Chair Michlewitz,

I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness to urge the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means to include in your respective FY25 budgets \$3.5 Million (Line-item 0321-1800) to start an Access to Council program in tandem with the full Access to Council bill language in S.864/H.4360, which provides the framework for a statewide program.

I also ask for your further consideration of the Network's additional [FY25 budget priorities](#) that will provide a holistic response to the homelessness and housing crisis in western Massachusetts and beyond.

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness ("Network") includes hundreds of partners from every sector across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties working to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach that centers racial equity.

Access to counsel is a critical tool to accomplish our mission. Right now in Massachusetts, 9 out of 10 tenants are unrepresented while over 80% of landlords have legal representation. It is a system grossly out of balance, with profoundly lasting consequences for the tens of thousands of children and their parents who must suffer the experience of eviction.

In western Massachusetts, we have seen a 36% rise in eviction filings over the last year, totaling close to 4,000 filings in the last 8 months alone. Our 2023 homelessness point in time count in January, 2023 (prior to the migrant family crisis), showed the highest increase in homelessness since any point over the last 5 years, totaling an estimated 3,305 individuals in the four western counties.

At a time when Massachusetts is facing unprecedented demand for shelter, when every tool must be harnessed to create greater housing stability, we urge you to include \$3.5 Million (Line-item 0321-1800) alongside the full Access to Counsel bill language contained in S.864/H.4360.

Best,

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