



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

October 21, 2025

The Honorable Lydia Edwards and the Honorable Michael Day
Joint Committee on the Judiciary
State House, Room 413-A and Room 136
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in support of:

*An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts (H.1952;) and
An Act establishing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness establishing a bill of rights
for people experiencing homelessness (S.1120)*

Dear Chair Edwards and Chair Day and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to submit testimony in support of two critical bills on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness.

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) includes hundreds of partners from across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties working to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach that centers racial equity. We urge you to please report out favorably the following two bills:

An Act to promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts (H.1952)

Access to counsel in evictions is vital to help stem the rising numbers of families facing homelessness in western Massachusetts and across the Commonwealth as a whole.

In western Massachusetts, eviction filings **increased 66% from 2022-2024** with close to 6,000 eviction filings in 2024 alone. Data also shows that statewide in 2024, 90% of landlords had legal representation while only 4.3% of tenants who faced eviction had representation (*Source: MassCourts as compiled by MassLandlords*).

The Network joins with over 240 organizations statewide to call for H.1952 to advance as a response to this ongoing crisis of housing instability and rising homelessness. It would establish a statewide Access to Counsel Program for low-income tenants and low-income landlord owner occupants in eviction proceedings. It addresses the imbalance of legal representation where landlords have attorneys who know how to navigate a complicated process and tenants - who face the potential loss of their home - do not. H.1952 is critical because it provides a framework for an Access to Counsel program.

Now more than ever it is urgent to stop evictions and prevent homelessness and passage of H.1952 is a critical tool to make this happen.


An Act establishing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness (S.1120)

The Network has adopted passage of this bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness as another critical priority this Legislative Session. Its passage is especially vital as an increasing number of municipalities across the Commonwealth enact or consider encampment and loitering bans criminalizing being unhoused rather than addressing the complex causes of homelessness.

This bill would offer an important guide for state and local officials, underscoring that people experiencing homelessness are entitled to the same rights as any other resident of Massachusetts, including protections when people are seeking employment, housing, voter registration, and access to public spaces and places of public accommodation. It is especially important in light of the increased numbers facing homelessness in western Massachusetts (and across the Commonwealth) due to the dire lack of affordable housing, and an ever-shrinking safety net under attack by the federal government.

We urge you to favorably report out these two bills at your earliest opportunity. We thank you for your consideration.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela Schwartz".

Pamela Schwartz, Director
Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness
pschwartz@westernmasshousingfirst.org
413-219-5658
<http://westernmasshousingfirst.org>