



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

November 20, 2025

Chair Julian Cyr
Joint Committee on Housing
24 Beacon Street, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

Chair Richard Haggerty
Joint Committee on Housing
24 Beacon Street, Room 146
Boston, MA 02133

RE: In support of:

- An Act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants (H.2328)
- An Act providing tenants first right of refusal (also known as Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act -TOPA) (S.998/H.1544)
- An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts (S.968)
- An Act to further regulate tenant fees in rental housing (eliminate junk fees) (S.984/H.1553)
- An Act relative to preventing algorithmic rent fixing in the rental housing market (S.1016/H.1564 and S.994)

Dear Chair Cyr, Chair Haggerty and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) in support of a number of housing bills before this committee, chief among them H.2328, *An Act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants*, as well as additional bills detailed below.

The Network convenes roughly 200 partners from across our western region, including Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties. The Network includes legislators, mayors and town managers and dozens of partners working to prevent and end homelessness with a housing first approach that centers racial equity.

The crisis of displacement due to spiraling rent increases is as pervasive in western Massachusetts as it is across the entire Commonwealth. It is truly gob-smacking to see rents rise 30 to 50 to 100% almost overnight. Residents are suddenly seeing their lives upended, terrified and traumatized by the threat of homelessness, with no possibility of affording the rent increase and nowhere else to go.

The examples are abundant across the entire western region, but for purposes of this testimony, I will focus on the city of Easthampton, a small community of roughly 16,000 people, located in Hampshire County. Over the last year, it has seen owners of multiple buildings impose dramatic rent increases on the dozens of residents who live there. Many residents are in their 70's or even 80's, or they are single parents with young children or they are immigrants making their way to a stable home, job and life in this country and Commonwealth.

In one instance, a 67-year old resident who has lived in the area for decades, returned home one day to discover a notice posted on her door declaring a 35% rent increase - \$400/month - with 12 days to sign a new lease or risk eviction. It was the dead of winter. She knew it would be impossible to find another place to live. As she put it: "I panicked, I cried, and I signed the lease." Her rent is now 42% of her income, and she is struggling to stay afloat.

This scenario is being played out almost daily across each of the four western counties and the entire Commonwealth as a whole.

H.2838 will give local communities like Easthampton the option to ensure landlords cannot cause this harm to its residents. It is not alone in asking the state to afford them the opportunity to provide basic housing stability protections for their community. Please heed their call and pass this bill.

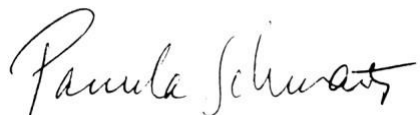
Additionally, the Network strongly supports these bills before this Committee:

- **An Act providing tenants first right of refusal** (also known as Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act -TOPA) (S.998/H.1544) to preserve affordable housing and prevent further displacement
- **An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts** (S.968) to create a state framework for this critical program that would markedly increase housing stability for tenants while creating a greater balance of justice through the eviction process
- **An Act to further regulate tenant fees in rental housing** (eliminate junk fees) (S.984/H.1553) to protect tenants against undue fees that impose a tremendous burden on tenants and undermine their housing stability
- **An Act relative to preventing algorithmic rent fixing in the rental housing market** (S.1016/H.1564 and S.994) to bring a stop to this engine for ever greater and predatory rent increases

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on all of these bills as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,



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