

February 7, 2024

Dear Honorable Members,

As you know, the Commonwealth is facing an unprecedented housing crisis and we thank you for your commitment this session to ensure that all residents in Massachusetts have safe and dignified housing.

On behalf of the over 240 organizations that make up the Access to Counsel coalition, we applaud Governor Healey for including \$3.5 million in her proposed FY25 Budget to start a statewide Access to Counsel Program for low-income tenants and owner-occupant landlords in eviction cases (Line Item 0321-1800). And we were thrilled to learn that yesterday, the Judiciary Committee voted to report the H.1731 Access to Counsel bill out favorably.

**We respectfully urge you to support the inclusion of Access to Counsel Line Item 0321-1800 in the FY25 budget, and pass it in tandem with the full Access to Counsel bill language in H.1731/S.864 (Sen. Sal DiDomenico and Reps. Michael Day & Dave Rogers) which provides the necessary framework for an Access to Counsel Program.**

The data illustrates the need - children under 5 are the people who face eviction the most, in 2023 **only 4% of tenants facing eviction had legal representation, while over 90% of landlords had representation**; and too often evictions push people into homelessness while increasing the strain on our state's shelter system.

Four states, 17 cities, and 1 county have established access to counsel programs and studies have repeatedly shown the enormous return on investment that these programs provide. Our sister New England state Connecticut adopted an Access to Counsel statute similar to the Access to Counsel bill in Massachusetts and **saved an estimated \$5.8 to \$6.3 million in 2022.**

The need for an Access to Counsel program in Massachusetts is growing. Please find attached here two recent articles highlighting the urgent need:

- [Tenants facing eviction need legal representation](#), *The Boston Globe*, authored by Yvonne Abraham after witnessing the imbalance of representation in housing court
- [Tenants facing eviction need lawyers](#), *Commonwealth Magazine*, co-authored with Trevor Samios of WinnCompanies

An **Access to Counsel program must be part of a comprehensive housing solution**. As *The Globe* reported: **"Here's something that works, and we can do right now."** We respectfully request that you weigh in with leadership in support of an Access to Counsel program. This is a proven program that could change the lives of thousands for the better throughout our communities. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or to further discuss this policy.

Sincerely,



Annette Duke, Mass Law Reform Institute, On Behalf the [Access to Counsel Supporters](#)