

March 17, 2023

Trial Court Chief Justice Jeffrey Locke
Housing Court Chief Justice Timothy Sullivan
Senate President Karen Spilka
Speaker of the House Ronald Mariano
Senate Ways and Means Committee Chair Michael Rodrigues
House Ways and Means Committee Chair Aaron Michlewitz
Members of the Massachusetts Legislature

Re: Take swift action to extend Chapter 257 eviction protections before they expire on March 31st

Dear Chief Justice Locke, Chief Justice Sullivan, Senate President Spilka, Speaker Mariano, Chairperson Rodrigues, Chairperson Michlewitz, and Members of the Legislature:

“Chapter 257”, a key eviction prevention tool, is set to expire on March 31st. Chapter 257 provides an avenue for a tenant who has applied for rental assistance but is in eviction proceedings to request, and requires the judge to grant, a continuance of the case or postponement of physical eviction until a decision is made on the rental assistance application. Allowing this critical tool to expire now could result in evictions where tenancies could have been resolved with rental assistance, pushing many families and individuals into homelessness. **We call upon you to take immediate action to extend these protections until July 31, 2024 to allow more time for a permanent solution to be put into place.**

The Legislature first enacted Chapter 257 of the Acts of 2020 to ensure tenants are not physically evicted while rental assistance applications are pending. The Legislature extended the deadline in Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, and extended it again through March 31, 2023 in Chapter 42 of the Acts of 2022. The law ensures that tenants are not needlessly displaced and maximizes rental assistance payments to landlords. It also requires landlords to upload notice to quit letters to a state tracking system, enabling agencies administering rental assistance to conduct outreach to landlords and tenants to prevent evictions. While not perfect, Chapter 257 has been an essential protection for tenants waiting for rental assistance applications to be processed.

The number of families and individuals applying for assistance through the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) homelessness prevention program remains at very high levels, reflecting the experience of tenants and advocates on the ground that Chapter 257 protections are still extremely important. Although the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has made efforts to streamline the program, the RAFT application process is complex and can require a significant amount of time for a tenant to gather their paperwork, the property owner to input their information, and the administering agency to process each application. The unfortunate reality is that many landlords are simply unwilling to

wait for RAFT funds — even if the result could be receiving money they are owed and preventing families and individuals from experiencing homelessness.

Before Chapter 257 was enacted, tenants awaiting rental assistance who already were in eviction proceedings had few options. Since going into effect in January 2021, at least 9,000 case continuances have been granted under the law, and untold numbers of tenants have been able to stabilize their housing and prevent eviction simply by having the chance to complete the rental assistance process. There is broad agreement among policymakers that residents across Massachusetts are experiencing a housing crisis. Chapter 257 is a key homelessness prevention tool that we know is working, at a time when housing instability is on the rise and the state is struggling to provide adequate shelter to families and individuals who are unhoused.

Extending Chapter 257 is a simple and commonsense action that will prevent unnecessary evictions, as the state works to address the broader housing crisis.

Judges, court staff, attorneys, and rental assistance providers are familiar with how Chapter 257 operates, and it has undoubtedly saved tenancies and provided money to landlords. Legislation already has been filed that includes language to codify Chapter 257 protections.¹ While we await legislative action on that bill, **we call upon the Trial Courts or Legislature to act immediately to extend Chapter 257 until at least July 31, 2024, either through a standing order, attaching language to pending legislation, or with the filing of a new targeted bill, that ensures that protections afforded in Chapter 257 continue without disruption.**

We look forward to working with you in the days and weeks ahead to promote greater housing stability.

Sincerely,

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Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Kelly Turley
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Endorsing Organizations (in alphabetical order):

2 Birds No Stones LLC
Amherst Affordable Housing Trust
Amherst Community Connections
Amherst Survival Center

¹ See *An Act relative to summary process and rental assistance*, [House Docket 3096](#) (filed by Representative Sam Montañó) and [Senate Docket 1883](#) (filed by Senator Liz Miranda.)

Arise For Social Justice
Bay Cove Human Services
Behavioral Health Network, Inc.
Berkshire Community College
Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority
Berkshire Housing
Berkshire Immigrant Center
Berkshire United Way
Boston Children's Hospital
Breaktime
Cathedral of the Beloved
Center for Human Development (CHD)/Family Outreach of Amherst
Center for Living & Working, Inc
Center for New Americans
Central Hampshire Veterans' Services
Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
Central West Justice Center
Chelsea Black Community
Chelsea Chamber of Commerce
Citizen STEAM
Citizens' Housing And Planning Association
City of Chelsea Acting City Manager Edward Keefe
City of Chelsea Department of Housing and Community Development
City of Chelsea Police Department
City of Chelsea Public Schools
City of Somerville Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
City of Somerville Office of Housing Stability
Coghlin Electrical Contractors
Commonwealth Care Alliance
Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc.
Community Action Pioneer Valley
Community Action Programs Inter-City
Community Healthlink
Comunidades Enraizadas Community Land Trust, Inc.
Craig's Doors
Disability Law Center
Dismas House of Massachusetts
DOVE, Inc.
Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath)
Eliot CHS Homeless Services
FamilyAid
Fenway Community Development Corporation
First Parish in Brookline
Franklin County DIAL SELF Inc.
Friendly House, Inc.
Friends of Hampshire County Homeless Individuals
Greater Boston Legal Services
GreenRoots
Grow Food Northampton
HarborCOV
Harvard Legal Aid Bureau

Homeless Prevention Council
Homes for All Massachusetts
HomeStart, Inc.
Housing Families Inc.
Housing Greenfield
HousingMatch.org
Humanity First Landlords
Independence House
Institute for Community Health
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Justice Resource Institute, Inc.
La Colaborativa, Inc.
Lawrence CommunityWorks
Lynn United for Change
Manaa
Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants
Mass General Brigham
Mass Senior Action Council
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Massachusetts Public Health Association
McCarter Law Office
Metro Housing|Boston
MetroWest Legal Services
MLPB (formerly Medical Legal Partnership | Boston)
Neighbor to Neighbor MA
NeighborWorks Housing Solutions
New England Learning Center for Women in Transition, Inc
New England United 4 Justice
New Lynn Coalition
Northampton Survival Center
Northeast Justice Center
Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, Western Massachusetts Chapter
One Family
OUR Resurge
Pax Christi Beverly
Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts
Progressive Massachusetts
Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts
RCAP Solutions
Reclaim Roxbury
Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts
Roots & Dreams and Mustard Seeds Inc.
Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston
Southeast Center for Independent Living
Springfield No One Leaves
St. Luke's-San Lucas Episcopal Church
The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
The Midas Collaborative

The Neighborhood Developers Inc.
United Way of Central Massachusetts
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley
Vasquez Mary Kay
Way Finders
Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness
Worcester City Councilor Etel Haxhij
Worcester Common Ground, Inc.
Worcester Community Action Council
Worcester Interfaith
Worcester Together
YWCA Central Massachusetts

cc: Trial Court Administrator Tom Ambrosino
DHCD Undersecretary Jennifer Maddox