

Western Massachusetts



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

Honorable Joseph Boncore, Chairman
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 112
Boston, MA 02133

Honorable Kevin Honan, Chairman
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 38
Boston, MA 02133

RE: House Bills No. 682 and 679

Dear Chairman Boncore and Chairman Honan:

I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness to vigorously **oppose H. 682**, which would categorically exclude level 2 and 3 former sex offenders from public housing in Massachusetts, and **H. 679**, which would ban the same population from subsidized housing in hotels and motels.

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness includes over 100 partners from the public and private sectors across the four Western counties of Massachusetts working to end homelessness with a Housing First approach. Its Working Group for Housing People with Sex Offense Histories, created 5 years ago, grew out of the homelessness crisis facing former sex offenders.

The most effective response to public safety concerns is access to housing. These proposed bills undermine the very goal that seemingly inspires them. The community is not made safer with categorical housing bans of an entire population without regard to individual circumstance. These bans only make homelessness and the accompanying destabilization and lack of access to services more likely. Both the individual and the community are put at greater risk.

It is entirely possible, indeed incumbent upon us, to establish policy that is data-driven and relies on meaningful indicators, such as nature of offense, treatment and supervision, time lapsed and record since offense, in determining whether an applicant is suitable for a particular housing unit. Housing authorities already retain the discretion to exclude individuals who they determine threaten the safety of other tenants. A categorical ban undermines a well-established process that serves both the community and the applicants.

As a practical, moral and legal matter, we urge you to oppose H. 682 and H. 679, as well as all other categorical restrictions on housing for former sex offenders. Let's keep our communities safe and uphold our constitutional right to due process - and humane treatment - for all individuals. Both are possible and go hand in hand.

Thank you so much for your attention.

Best,
Pamela

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