



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

November 26, 2024

The Honorable Maura Healey
Governor of Massachusetts
State House Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Ensure that Access to Counsel Program in Evictions Is Permanent and Stable; Include \$5 Million in Proposed FY26 House 1 Budget (Line Item 0321-1800)

Dear Governor Healey:

I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness with a note of thanks and a request.

First, a heartfelt thank you from the hundreds of our partners in the western region for your leadership that paved the way for Access to Counsel to become part of the FY25 budget. We are so grateful for this important step forward that resulted in a \$2.5 million pilot program in this year's final budget.

Secondly, the request: we are writing to ask you to return to your initial vision and propose for FY26 a full 12 months of funding at \$5 million, without the word "pilot" in the line item. This is critical to create a permanent and stable program and to fulfill the commitment of full representation, not limited assistance, as the program was envisioned and as the goal of greater housing stability requires.

Just last week, in Hampden and Hampshire County alone, 691 households filed applications for RAFT, that is, **over 138 applicants each day**. Western Massachusetts is facing an epidemic of housing stability and homelessness, and we know we are far from alone. Access to Counsel is one vital tool that will help stem this tide of homelessness. We ask for your FY26 budget to ensure that your vision is realized with a program that can deliver on its promise.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

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