

Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants  
784 Washington St, Suite 504  
Dorchester, MA 02124



March 5, 2024

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz  
Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means  
State House Room 243

RE: FY25 Budget and Investing in Public Housing Communities

Dear Chair Michlewitz,

The Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants, a statewide organization that advocates on behalf of public housing residents, is excited to work with you, the House Committee on Ways and Means, and the administration to strengthen state public housing in the FY25 budget. Public housing provides permanently affordable housing to extremely low-income vulnerable seniors, people with disabilities, veterans and families and is critical to preserve.

Secretary Augustus told a room full of over 100 public housing resident leaders at Mass Union's Fall Convention last month: Massachusetts is fortunate, unlike other states, to have 44,000 units of state public housing, but this housing has lacked investment for over 30-40 years and it is time to make up for that. The Affordable Homes Act, H. 4138, proposes a significant investment to make needed repairs and capital improvements to preserve state public housing for future generations, but there is more the state can do through the FY25 Budget.

We urge your committee to protect state public housing and the people who live in it by:

- 1. Increasing the Public Housing Operating Subsidy Line Item (7004-9005) to \$189 million.** Housing authorities have been underfunded for decades. While the Affordable Homes Act proposes a significant capital infusion, limited operating funds have prevented housing authorities from providing basic maintenance and effectively turning over vacant units. In 2005 [A Study of the Appropriate Operating Costs for State-Funded Public Housing in Massachusetts](#) found that annual operating appropriations should increase to about \$115 million. This study is over 20 years old. Adjusted for inflation it has been estimated that the subsidy needs to increase to \$189 million. The Governor has proposed in H.2 \$112 million for public housing operating funding. We urge you to continue to raise the operating subsidy to what is truly needed to preserve public housing.
- 2. Providing Technical Assistance for Tenants Facing Redevelopment in the amount of \$1 million.** Section 36 of H. 4138, the Affordable Homes Act, includes a critical provision ensuring that when redevelopment happens, tenant rights must be continued, and housing authorities must ensure that tenants have technical assistance. This language mirrors S. 857/H.1340, [An Act ensuring continued rights for public housing residents](#), proposed by Representative Honan and Senator Crighton. We are excited to advance this provision with the legislature. These redevelopment deals are complicated and tenants

need assistance to navigate the process so that their crucial insights can be included. When Secretary Augustus spoke at Mass Union's Fall Convention, he told residents that as EOHLC sees projects moving forward with private developers, EOHLC wants to make sure that that residents are at the table from the beginning of redevelopment, that their voices are heard, and that they are provided with technical assistance so that residents are not "outgunned." To ensure that technical assistance is available to tenants, we urge you to establish a new line item, a Technical Assistance Fund for Public Housing Residents, in the amount of \$1 million and that Mass Union would work with EOHLC to build and train technical assistance teams that can be deployed to residents around the state facing redevelopment.

### **3. Start to Phase in an Access to Counsel Program**

We urge that the House Ways and Means Committee support the establishment of an Access to Counsel Program through a dedicated line item in its FY25 budget in the amount of \$3.5 million, as proposed by Governor Healey in her House 2 proposed budget (Line-item 0321-1800), and **pass the dedicated line-item in tandem with the full bill language of H.4360, *An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts***, reported favorably by the Judiciary Committee, which provides the framework for a program. In addition to court representation, H.4360 provides upstream representation to tenants in administrative hearings which can prevent public housing facing eviction from having an eviction case filed against them in court.

On behalf of thousands of public housing tenants across the state, thank you for your work to protect the Commonwealth's public housing and the people living there.

Sincerely,

Dave Underhill, President Mass Union Board  
Fall River

CC: Blake Webber, Chief of Staff  
Representative Kevin Honan  
Representative Dave Rogers  
Representative Michael Day  
Secretary Ed Augustus, Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities  
Eric Shupin, Chief of Policy at Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities