

February 28, 2017

Representative _____
Massachusetts State House, Room _____
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Representative _____,

On behalf of the HousingCourt4All Coalition, MLRI wishes to thank you for co-sponsoring the bill to expand the Housing Court statewide. Both bills, H. 978 and S. 946, have been referred to the Judiciary Committee. No hearing date has been set yet.

We are also very pleased that Governor Baker proposed in his FY18 budget \$1 million to start the expansion this year. **We hope that you make this one of your priorities for the FY18 budget and sign-on to Representative Walsh's letter to House Ways and Means urging the Committee to include funds and authorization for statewide Housing Court expansion in its FY18 budget.**

Why Invest in Housing Courts

In 2013, the Massachusetts Trial Court Strategic Plan found that the **Housing Court Department had the lowest cost per case across all Trial Court Departments**. It is lean and agile, with Judges and Court Staff traveling circuit to hear cases.

In FY2016, there were 27,487 eviction cases filed in the Housing Court statewide. The Housing Court Department estimates that the expansion statewide could increase its eviction case load by approximately 6,000 eviction cases. This is because the areas that are currently unserved have a high percentage of rental units.

In terms of cost, the Housing Court Department has estimated that it would need approximately \$2.4 million a year to fully fund expansion. This funding would provide 5 new Judges, 6 new Housing Specialists, and new clerks and clerical staff. Under the leadership of Chief Justice Sullivan, the Housing Court Department anticipates that space would be in existing courts.

An investment to expand the Housing Court statewide is a sound investment in a well-respected and efficient institution that has a significant impact on people's lives and the quality of housing in our communities.

Housing Courts Save the State Money

Our conservative estimates show that the Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP), a program that is **available only in Housing Court, saves the state from spending \$4 - \$8 million in shelter costs**. TPP seeks to prevent some of the most vulnerable tenants who face mental health struggles and age-related impairments from losing their housing. It is embraced by landlords and helps them save money by retaining tenants. If the Housing Court were to expand to cover the

entire state, TPP could save the state an additional \$1.8 million. **The current and future savings from TPP would more than cover the cost of the investment of Housing Court expansion.**

Housing Courts also save landlords money. The Trial Court estimates that **4 out of 5 landlords file in Housing Court where they have a choice between Housing and District Court.** The value for landlords, especially unrepresented landlords, is that Housing Specialists, who are available only in Housing Courts, help facilitate settlements. A settlement agreement where the tenant agrees to move out or where the tenant agrees to pay rent in exchange for repairs, can save the landlord the costs of litigation, constable fees, storage fees, move out fees, and the cost of re-renting an apartment.

Municipal Support

The investment in the expansion of the Housing Court would also result in municipal officials in all communities having access to Housing Court.

Mayors, City and Town Managers, Municipal Lawyers, Fire Fighters, Boards of Health, and Police Officers are part of the local infrastructure that use and want Housing Courts. They use Housing Courts to put abandoned, tax delinquent and distressed properties into receiverships; and through receiverships they bring properties up to code and put them back into use **resulting in more housing and in increased local tax revenue.** Attached is a sampling of receivership cases in Housing Courts throughout the state.

Broad Based Support

Support for statewide Housing Court expansion continues to grow across the state as well as within the State House. Currently, leaders from 22 municipalities and over 130 organizations are calling for a statewide Housing Court (see attached).

We hope that this is the year that the Governor, the House, and the Senate will join together to complete the expansion of the Housing Court statewide.

If I can provide you with further information, please contact me.

Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

Annette Duke
Attorney
617-357-0700, ext 334
ADuke@MLRI.org