



Board of Directors September 15, 2021

President
Amy Schectman

The Honorable James Arciero
House Chair
Joint Committee on Housing

The Honorable John Keenan
Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Housing

President-Elect
Felicia Jacques

RE: Testimony Supporting H.1417, *An Act restoring the Commonwealth's public housing*

Vice Presidents
Andrew DeFranza
Gordon Pulsifer

Dear Chairs Arciero, Keenan, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Committee on Housing,

Treasurer
Angie Liou

On behalf of Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA), thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of legislation that will help protect the thousands of residents in deeply affordable homes provided by local housing authorities (LHAs), H.1417, *An Act restoring the Commonwealth's public housing*, filed by Representative Kevin Honan.

Clerk
Naomi Sweitzer

CHAPA's mission is to encourage the production and preservation of housing that is affordable to families and individuals with low and moderate incomes and to foster diverse and sustainable communities through planning and community development.

Andrea Aldana
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Dara Kovel
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Kathy McGilvray
Chris Norris
Leslie Reid
Olivia Richard
Dr. Megan Sandel

CHAPA believes that everyone should have a safe, healthy, accessible, and affordable home in communities they choose. We are the only statewide group that represents the entire housing ecosystem. CHAPA is a trusted convener and consensus builder to a wide range of interests making sure that our state is enacting, investing in, and implementing smart affordable housing policies.

Chief Executive Officer
Rachel Heller

The Commonwealth's future is shaped by us. In Massachusetts, we all flourish when our neighbors and neighborhoods that we love flourish. To ensure the future of the people and places we love, we must keep cultivating our shared strength by reporting out and passing H.1417.

Where we grow makes us strong. It plays a huge role in whether we have what we need to flourish or whether we will struggle to thrive. Unfortunately, these opportunities have been withheld from so many of the Commonwealth's families—especially families of color, seniors, and persons with disabilities—through policies that have drained our collective strength.

H.1417 will help everyone in the Commonwealth flourish by providing a better future for thousands of Massachusetts residents that call public housing home, strengthen our communities, and create even more safe and healthy homes where everyone can thrive.

H.1417 will help restore our public housing by allowing LHAs to leverage new and additional resources for rehabilitating these deeply affordable homes. Specifically, H.1417 exempts public housing development projects from the bidding requirements for public construction projects; allows Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreements that LHAs have with municipalities to apply to these projects; and allows LHAs to borrow against their capital funds and retain the proceeds from the sale of their property.

H.1417 will also help grow a housing ecosystem that benefits everyone—our people, our communities, and our systems.

For our people, H.1417 will help the nearly 70,000 low-income veterans, seniors, people with disabilities, and families, with nearly two-thirds of which are Black, Indigenous, or people of color. The bill will help make their homes safe, providing better opportunities for families to work, care for their families, and educate their children. By removing health hazards, each resident's health will be better.

For our communities, H.1417 will help grow stronger neighborhoods around our public housing. Rehabilitated homes will help replace outdated and energy inefficient buildings which will improve the health and well-being of the entire community.

For our systems, H.1417 will help address social and economic inequality by improving the homes of thousands of residents in public housing—helping to reverse decades of disinvestment into public housing while protecting the ability of our lowest income residents to remain in their community. Also, by providing better homes for our residents, H.1417 will strengthen our health, education, and workforce systems—leading to better outcomes for not only residents of public housing but also the entire Commonwealth.

H.1417 gives us the opportunity to cultivate a stronger housing ecosystem by giving public housing the tools and resources it needs help restore the over 43,000 homes that public housing provides.

Unfortunately, the current way we support our public housing puts us at risk of losing these homes and threatens the health and safety of some of our most vulnerable residents, with 66% of residents in public housing seniors or persons with disabilities.

Massachusetts has a strong public housing infrastructure in place, but it needs repair. With much of our public housing built more than 50 years ago and a backlog of needed repairs, we must provide every tool and resource needed to save our public housing.

Inadequate funding levels combined with policies that slow the rehabilitation process and make it more expensive and difficult to use all of our affordable housing resources make it difficult and put up unnecessary barriers for housing authorities to complete these projects.

H.1417 addresses these issues by allowing housing authorities to take advantage of all the resources available to create and preserve public housing. It provides a balanced and targeted approach to preserving every public housing home; protecting current and future residents of that public housing; creating good-paying construction jobs; and even building more affordable homes.

H.1417 can also help us recover from the pandemic and protect against future housing instability. Tens of thousands of residents who lost jobs or got the virus faced the very real fear of losing their home. While eviction moratoria and emergency rental assistance helped many of these residents, these were temporary solutions.

Residents of public housing have more housing stability because rents are more affordable and a resident does not have to immediately worry about losing their home if they get sick or they lose their income. By ensuring the long-term health of our public housing, we can lessen the threat of any future or ongoing pandemic.

There has never been a better moment to put Massachusetts on a path to equity, resilience, and sustainability through housing. Affordable housing is a top priority of Massachusetts residents. We have committed leadership at the state. We also have new tools and resources to build more homes that are affordable.

We need bold action to harvest a strong future. CHAPA urges the Committee to vote out H.1417 favorably. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment in growing a Commonwealth where everyone can thrive.

Sincerely,



Eric Shupin
Director of Public Policy

cc: Members of the Joint Committee on Housing