



President
Soni Gupta

April 30, 2019

President-Elect
Amy Schectman

The Honorable Kevin Honan
State House, Room 38
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Brendan Crighton
State House, Room 520
Boston, MA 02133

Vice President
Charleen Regan

RE: Testimony for Public Housing Committee Hearing

Treasurer
Joseph Flatley

Dear Chairman Honan, Chairman Crighton, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Committee on Housing,

Clerk
Naomi Sweitzer

On behalf of Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA), thank you for the opportunity to testify today. CHAPA's mission is to encourage the production and preservation of housing that is affordable to low and moderate income families and individuals and to foster diverse and sustainable communities through planning and community development. We are offering testimony today in support of important legislation that will help preserve our state's public housing, support resident leaders, and provide services that will help prevent evictions.

Chief Executive Officer
Rachel Heller

Specifically, CHAPA supports the following bills:

- **H.1291 & S.777, *An Act relative to local housing authority board member elections***
- **H.1320 & S.785, *An Act leveraging additional resources for local housing authorities***
- **H.1279, *An Act relative to housing service coordinators***
- **H.1321 & S.774, *An Act Restoring the Commonwealth's public housing***

H.1291 & S.777, *An Act relative to local housing authority board member elections*

Sponsored by Representative Kevin Honan & Senator Joseph Boncore

This legislation ensures tenant participation in the governance of their homes and helps local housing authorities (LHAs) in towns to operate more effectively by creating a process to appoint a resident to the tenant-designated seat on housing authority boards.

In 2014, public housing reform legislation made changes to housing authority governance by designating a seat housing boards in towns for a tenant. This

matched a similar requirement for housing authorities in cities that already had a tenant-designated seat for their boards.

Unfortunately, since the public housing reform legislation was signed into law, efforts to create a process to elect a tenant board member in towns have proved unworkable. This has resulted in tenant seats on housing authority boards in towns going unfilled and confusion among tenants, housing authorities, and town clerks.

According to this legislation, the tenant member for the housing authority board will be appointed by the town from a list of tenant names submitted by the housing authority residents. This process mirrors how tenants are currently appointed to housing authority boards in cities.

This legislation also creates a process for reducing the number of town-wide elected housing authority board members in towns from four to three, which the reform legislation from 2014 did not address. Under these bills, the board seat that has expired or the next seat to expire or become vacant shall be filled by the appointed tenant member.

This legislation was developed together with the Department of Housing and Community Development, MassNAHRO, Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants, the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, and CHAPA.

Again, this legislation will increase tenant participation in the governance of their housing authorities in towns. Tenants are ready to begin serving on their housing authority boards. The Mel King Institute's Public Housing Training Program has been operating over the last few years to provide training for residents of public housing to support their full participation in the oversight of their housing developments. This includes resident leader training and resident board member training, which helps participants handle the challenges unique to their role as both a resident and Board Member.

This prepares residents to help to manage budget and capital improvement plans and other governance related work of the board. It helps residents build confidence to perform their duties and help contribute to a thriving community at their housing authority.

H.1320 & S.785, *An Act leveraging additional resources for local housing authorities*

Sponsored by Representative Dave Rogers & Senator Brendan Crighton

CHAPA supports this legislation that would provide local housing authorities (LHAs) with additional resources to preserve and rehabilitate public housing. The bill will allow housing authorities borrow against their capital funds and retain the proceeds from the sale of their property.

This bill would allow state-funded local housing authorities to pledge a portion of capital funds awarded to it for improvements carried out pursuant to a DHCD approved capital improvement plan.

Because the amount of capital funds available to an LHA in any given year is often less than what is required to undertake urgent capital needs, such as roof replacement across all buildings in a given project, the ability to borrow against a stream of capital funds will allow LHAs to carry out critical projects in a timelier manner, with associated cost savings.

This bill would also make changes that would allow state-aided public housing authorities to sell land and retain the proceeds to reinvest into rehabilitation and preservation projects. Currently, these proceeds are returned to the Commonwealth.

Under both provisions, the newly leveraged resources will be used to address modernization and maintenance needs at state-aided public housing. This will help ensure that the state's portfolio of over 45,000 state-assisted public housing units remains available for low-income residents.

H.1279, *An Act relative to housing service coordinators*

Sponsored by Representative Kevin Honan

CHAPA supports this bill that creates a housing services coordinator program to assist residents in subsidized housing. The service coordinators will help mediate disputes between landlords and tenants and will help coordinate other economic self-sufficiency services.

Working with residents, the service coordinators will help reduce evictions, increase housing stability, and coordinate residents' access to opportunities for education, job training, and other services that may increase economic mobility.

Residents in developments that participate in this program will be provided the opportunity to meet with the housing service coordinator at least 30 days before a property owner files an eviction case, unless there is an immediate threat to healthy or public safety.

For low-income families—including those with housing subsidies—it can be difficult to stay ahead of expenses, including food, clothing, transportation, school supplies, or unreimbursed health care costs. As a result, many families can fall behind on their rent. Once behind in rent, getting caught up is so difficult that some never manage to catch up and the family faces eviction.

There are no winners when a subsidized family is evicted. The human costs to young children and their parents are evident. The future economic and social costs in responding to these consequences are immense. In Massachusetts, a family receiving a subsidy that is evicted due to nonpayment of rent is not eligible for emergency shelter services for three years. Often, these families are thrust into homelessness with no options for assistance until the three years is up

Evictions can also be expensive for property owners, with legal fees and other expenses costing over \$10,000. Through housing service coordinators, who have been proven effective at increasing housing stability, this bill will help prevent evictions of families from subsidized housing, benefitting both the residents and property owners.


H.1321 & S.774, *An Act Restoring the Commonwealth's public housing*
Sponsored by Representative Daniel Ryan & Senator Joseph Boncore

CHAPA supports this legislation that would provide state local housing authorities with additional flexibility to redevelop their public housing. Specifically, the legislation exempts state-aided public housing redevelopment by private entities from the state filed sub-bid law. These public bidding requirements can add an estimated 20% to the cost of a redevelopment project. By lowering the cost of redeveloping public housing, this legislation will support creative efforts to repair and rehabilitate public housing in Massachusetts to ensure that these homes remain affordable and available for all current and future residents.

However, the legislation would not exempt these redevelopment projects from prevailing wage requirements.

Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership on helping everyone in the Commonwealth have a safe, healthy, and affordable place to call home.

Sincerely,



Rachel Heller
Chief Executive Officer