Access to Counsel Report
FY25

MLAC
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

Executive Summary

In FY25 the Access to Counsel Program (ATCP) was included as a line item in the state budget (0321-1800) and funded at $2.5 million. Administered by the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), the program is designed to increase access to full legal representation for tenants and owner-occupants with low incomes in eviction proceedings.

ATCP Demonstrates Early Success

In January 2025, legal services programs started scaling up ATCP work to provide full representation in eviction cases and opened 721 cases in six months.

Between January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025:

- 721 cases were opened
- In 97% of closed cases, the tenant had a positive outcome where the eviction was either prevented or the tenant received more time to move.
- ATCP was rolled out in every region of the Commonwealth
- ATCP grantees increased staff capacity to provide full representation and were successful in bringing together legal teams to make the program a success

The full ATCP report below provides more data and details on the progress the Access to Counsel Program has made in FY25.

Background on the Process to Establish the Access to Counsel Program

Prior to distributing funds, MLAC reached out to more than 200 stakeholders in communities across the Commonwealth to solicit input about how best to focus the Access to Counsel Program. From this feedback, MLAC identified four focus areas for representation:

1. Tenants with vouchers facing eviction that could cause the termination of their voucher.
2. Tenants facing eviction living in a property managed by a housing authority or in a particular housing authority.
3. Tenants facing eviction by private landlords who own a large number of units and engage in problematic practices impacting tenants that often lead to eviction.
4. Low-income owner occupants in eviction proceedings.

These areas of focus were chosen because the stakes are so high. Tenants with housing vouchers or who live in public housing are often the most vulnerable and most at risk of facing homelessness. Tenants who lose a housing voucher or are evicted from public housing will face long waiting lists to obtain a housing voucher or to live in public housing again. Helping public housing and subsidized tenants prevent eviction is critical to maintaining housing stability and preventing homelessness. These types of cases also allow attorneys and paralegals the potential to engage in successful advocacy at the administrative hearings stage with housing authorities, so that evictions can be prevented before a court case is filed.

Tenants living in buildings with multiple units owned by private landlords may have problematic housing conditions that are not addressed by the landlord. Pervasive mold causing respiratory conditions, bed bug infestations, faulty wiring and a lack of fire alarms are just a few examples. A legal aid attorney can make all the difference when instead of fixing problems, building owners try to evict tenants in retaliation for seeking repairs or for filing a request for an inspection with their local housing code department.

Through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, MLAC selected the following eight legal aid organizations for the program. Six represented tenants; one represented owner-occupants; and one assisted MLAC with implementation, outreach and training:

- Community Legal Aid
- De Novo Center for Justice and Healing
- Greater Boston Legal Services
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- MetroWest Legal Services
- Northeast Legal Aid
- South Coastal Counties Legal Services
- Volunteer Lawyers Project

Program Rollout

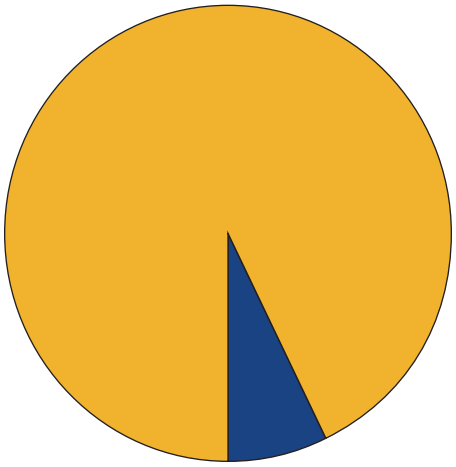
MLAC invested significant time and effort to plan and implement the ATCP to ensure its success. The legal aid organizations recruited attorneys and paralegals and engaged in outreach to communities to raise awareness of the services available. Legal aid programs began taking full representation cases in January 2025.

The ATCP was rolled out in every region of the Commonwealth. In just the first six months, ATCP grantees increased staff capacity to provide full representation to eligible clients in eviction cases and have been successful in bringing together legal teams. Success stories from completed cases reveal the enormous impact this program has had on individuals, families, and communities across Massachusetts.

Case Data for the Period January 1, 2025 - June 30, 2025

Addressing the Imbalance of Representation

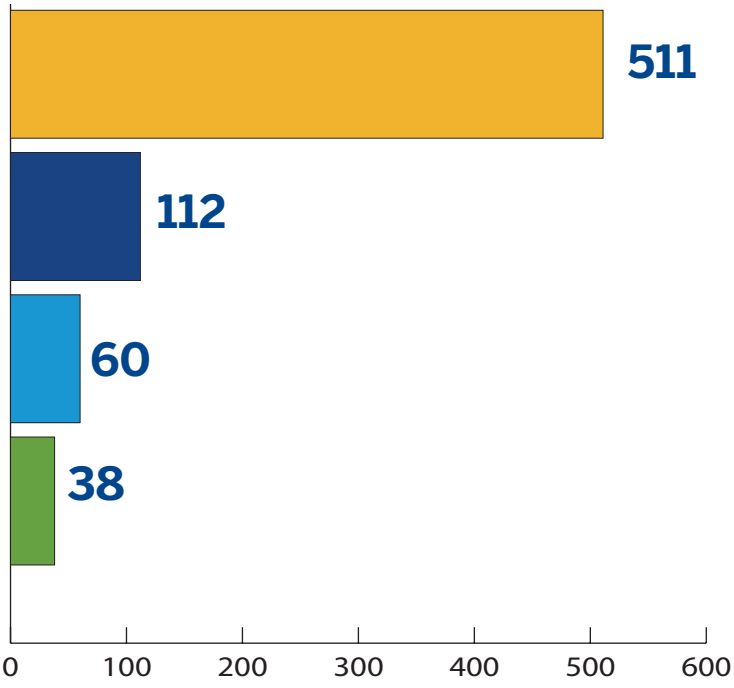
In 93% of ATCP cases opened, the opposing party was represented by counsel.



- **93%** Opposing party represented by counsel
- **7%** Opposing party not represented by counsel

Reaching Tenants in Larger Properties

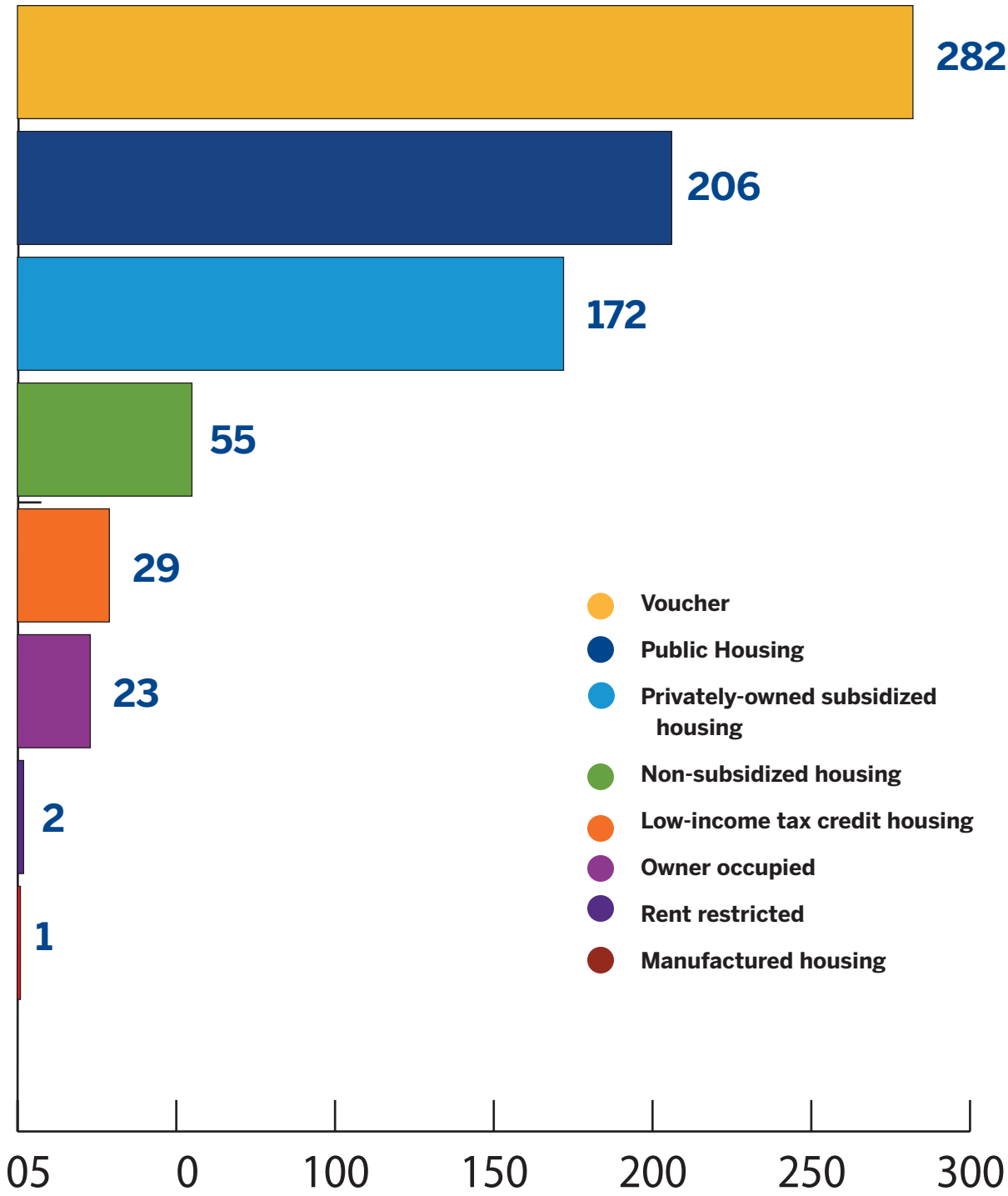
The vast majority of ATCP clients lived in buildings with 10 or more units.



- **10** or more units
- **1-3** units
- **4-9** units
- Information not collected

Serving Vulnerable Tenants in Subsidized Housing

The majority of ATCP clients lived in subsidized housing and had a housing voucher and/or lived in public housing.



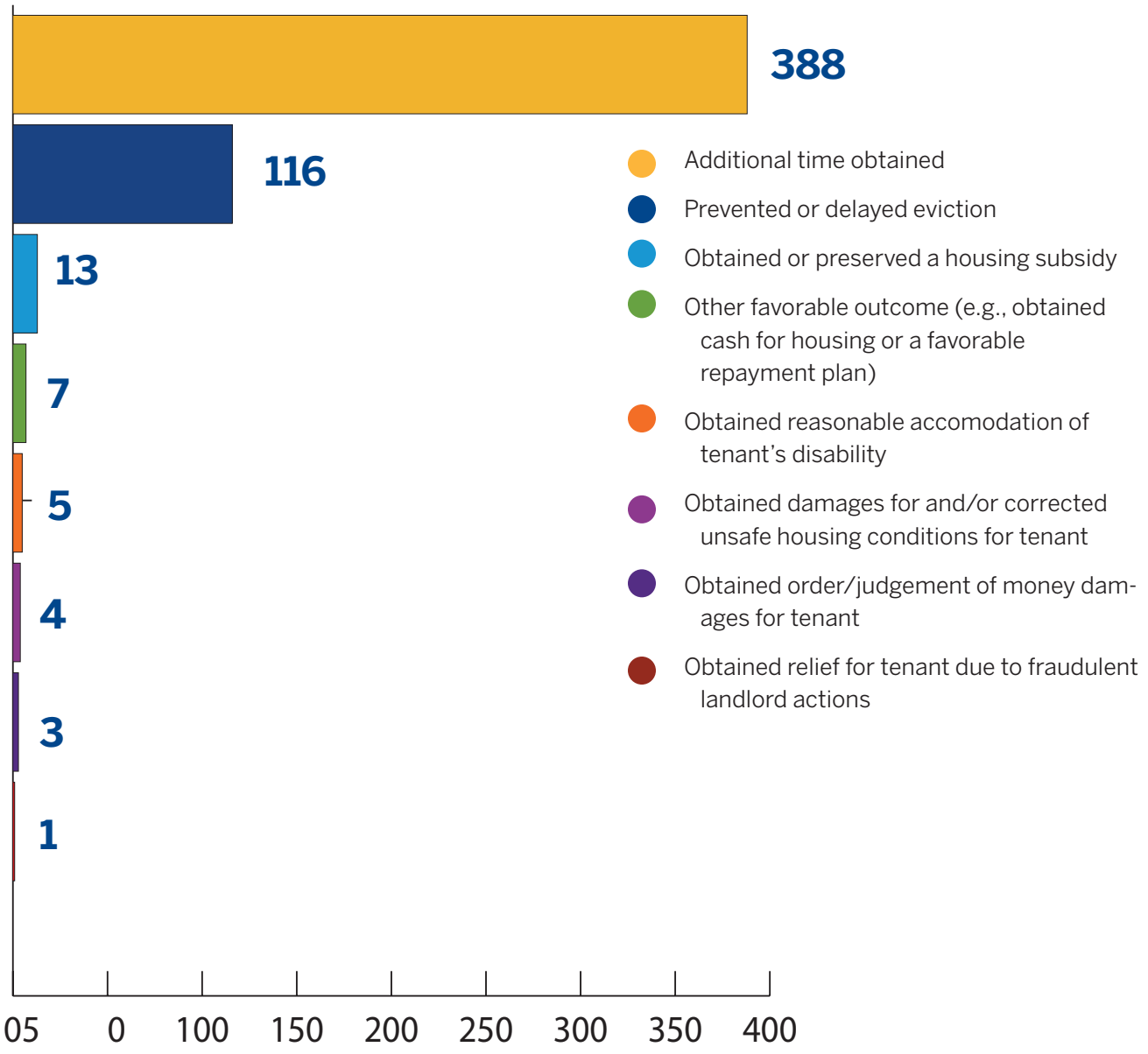
Note: More than one "housing type" may apply to a single case; for example, a client could be using a voucher for an owner-occupied unit.

Favorable Outcomes are Resulting in Housing Stability

As mentioned above, in 97% of closed cases, the tenant had a positive outcome where the eviction was either prevented or the tenant received more time to move.

A single case could have multiple favorable outcomes. Reported outcomes include:

- Tenants obtained additional time to move in 388 cases
- Tenancy preserved or delayed eviction in 116 cases
- Subsidy preserved or obtained in 13 cases
- Reasonable accommodation obtained in 5 cases
- Tenant obtained damages for unsafe housing conditions in 4 cases

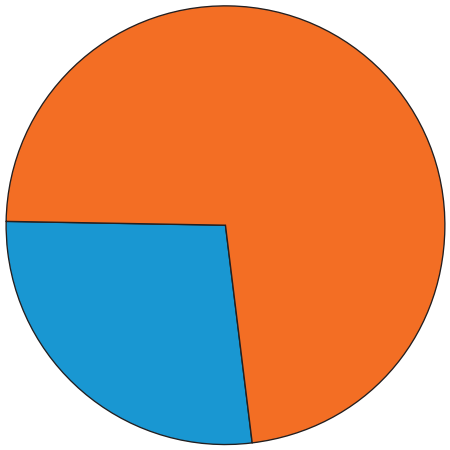


Note: Some favorable outcomes were reported in cases that remain open; this could involve matters where there is an agreement to move out by a certain date and the attorney is monitoring the case should further action be needed.

Project leads from each of the participating organizations noted that ATCP was achieving better outcomes since the court and opposing counsel understand from the beginning of a case that legal aid will remain involved all the way through to resolution, including a trial, if necessary.

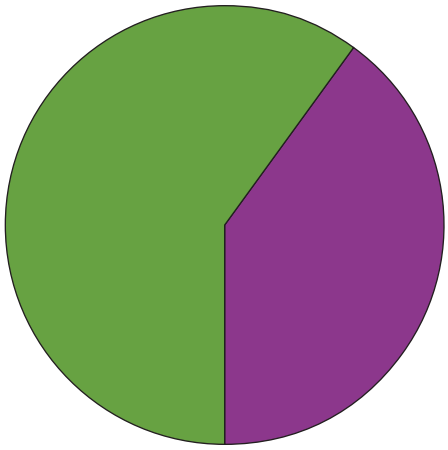
Who is Being Served by ATCP?

ATCP clients facing eviction are some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in Massachusetts.



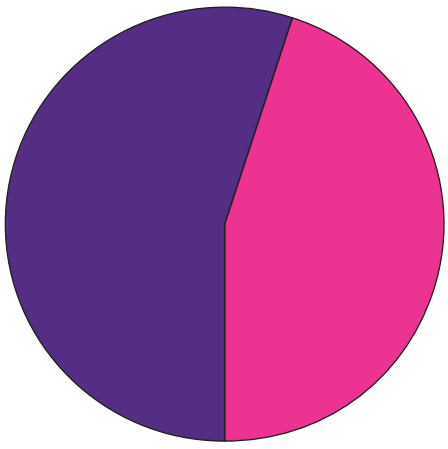
73% of clients were female

- Female - **73%**
- Male - **27%**



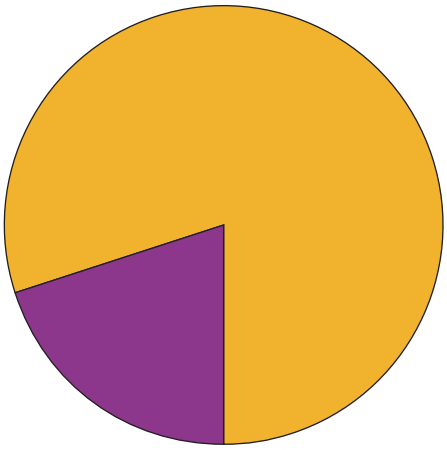
40% of clients had children

- Clients without children - **60%**
- Clients with children - **40%**



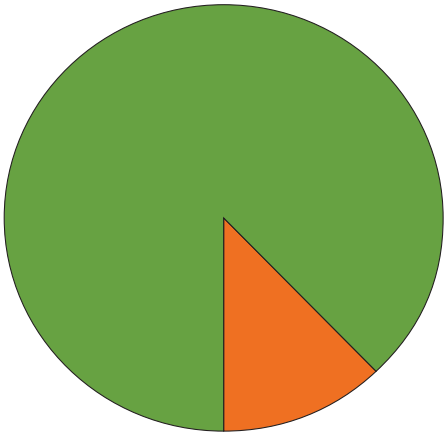
55% of clients had a disability

- Clients with a disability - **55%**
- Clients without a disability - **45%**



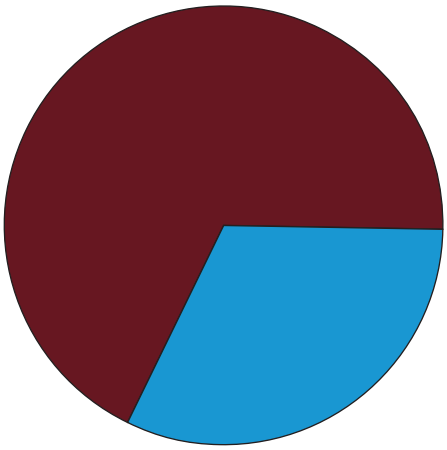
20% of clients were 65 or older

- 18-64 - **80%**
- 65 or older - **20%**



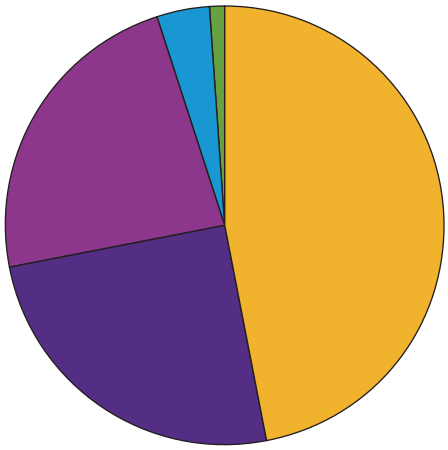
12% of clients reported limited English proficiency

- Clients proficient in English - **88%**
- Clients with limited English proficiency - **12%**



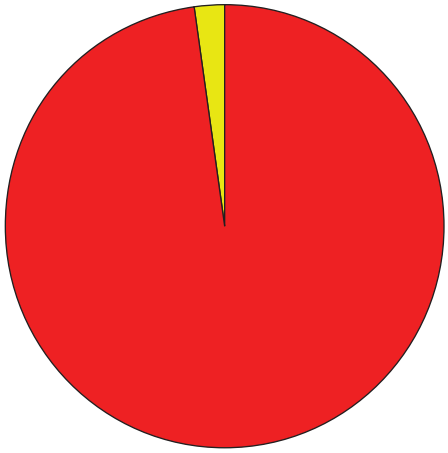
32% of clients were of Hispanic origin

- Clients not of Hispanic origin - **68%**
- Clients of Hispanic origin - **32%**



The ATCP client population was racially diverse

- White - **47%**
- Other - **25%**
- Black - **23%**
- Multiple Races - **4%**
- Asian - **1%**



The majority of ATCP clients were tenants

- Client was tenant - **98%**
- Client was landlord - **2%**

Outreach and Training

An essential aspect of the ATCP is building the infrastructure needed to support a strong program through training new staff and engaging in outreach and education to reach tenants facing an eviction.

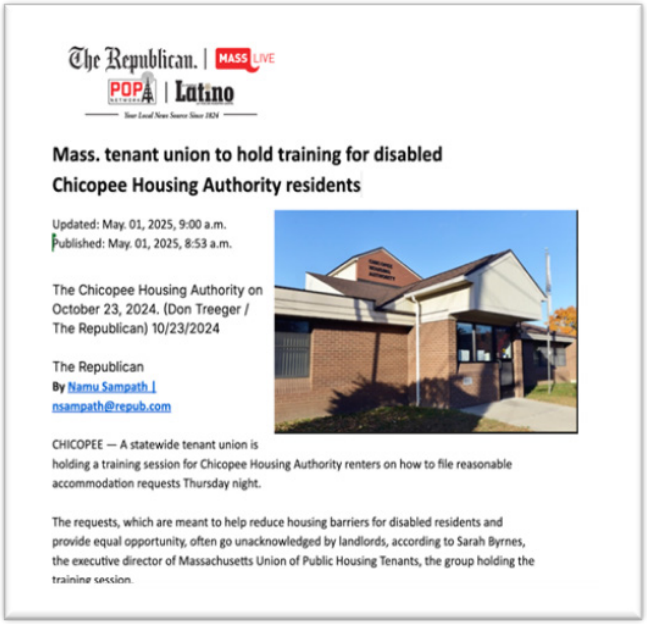
Training

Based on feedback, the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) Director of Training developed a practice-oriented and skills-based training on Introducing Evidence, a key skill that is essential for attorneys to effectively represent tenants in hearings and at trial. MLRI's training supplemented training and mentoring provided by local legal services programs.

Two initial training sessions developed by MLRI were spread over three weeks and provided opportunities for one-on-one support, small group work, and practice, including a moot court led by a retired Housing Court Judge. Twenty attorneys participated. Feedback was very positive, and many attendees requested further training on a variety of topics.

Community-Centered Outreach and Education

ATCP was focused on public housing, so MLRI coordinated with the Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants (a statewide, grassroots organization) to partner with ATCP-designated organizations on strategic outreach and education for tenants in public housing. Mass Union helped two legal services organizations conduct a Know Your Rights training.



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Mass. tenant union to hold training for disabled Chicopee Housing Authority residents

Updated: May. 01, 2025, 9:00 a.m.
Published: May. 01, 2025, 8:53 a.m.

The Chicopee Housing Authority on October 23, 2024. (Don Treeger / The Republican) 10/23/2024

The Republican
By Namu Sampath |
nsampath@repub.com

CHICOPEE — A statewide tenant union is holding a training session for Chicopee Housing Authority renters on how to file reasonable accommodation requests Thursday night.

The requests, which are meant to help reduce housing barriers for disabled residents and provide equal opportunity, often go unacknowledged by landlords, according to Sarah Byrnes, the executive director of Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants, the group holding the training session.

In Chicopee, a bilingual team of six people from Mass Union knocked on over 800 doors in 11 developments, and Community Legal Aid conducted a training to educate tenants about reasonable accommodations and their rights.

MetroWest Legal Services
Protecting rights. Improving lives.

MLRI MASSACHUSETTS LAW REFORM INSTITUTE

MASSACHUSETTS UNION OF PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS

SPECIAL TRAINING

For Maynard Public Housing Tenants

Know Your Rights!

Wednesday, June 11, 6pm - 7pm
Open Table
31 Main St, Maynard, MA 01754
(Second Door inside 33 Main St offices)

With attorneys from MetroWest Legal Services
And organizers from the Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants

Join this training to learn about your rights as a tenant. Tenants have the right to be treated with respect, to safe and sanitary living conditions, to file grievances when things go wrong, to form tenant organizations, and more.

Sponsored by the Access to Counsel Project

For more information, contact Mass Union at
www.massunion.org 617-825-9750 info@massunion.org

Mass Union also did outreach in the Maynard Housing Authority area and partnered with MetroWest Legal Services to conduct a Know Your Rights training for public housing tenants at a nearby food pantry.

Through these trainings, tenants learned about ATCP. The trainings also led to the updating of a *Rent in Public Housing* booklet with information about how tenants can prevent evictions as a result of rent miscalculations or other rent issues. The booklet was translated into Spanish and is available in both languages online at the Mass Legal Help website (the full URL for the webpage is: masslegalhelp.org/housing-apartments-shelter/public-subsidized-housing/rent-public-housing).

Client Story

Maria (name changed for client privacy)

When Maria contacted MetroWest Legal Services (MWLS), she was in a deeply stressful situation. A single mother of two—including a daughter battling cancer —Maria had just received an eviction notice for alleged lease violations. She feared that she and her children would become homeless.

A MWLS attorney reassured Maria that she had rights and her landlord could not evict her without a court order. Maria had a Section 8 mobile housing voucher and had already applied for a promising new apartment but needed time for the housing authority to approve the unit.

MWLS advocated on her behalf, negotiating with opposing counsel to delay the filing of an eviction case. This critical time allowed the approval process to move forward and ensured that Maria and her children could transition to her new home safely and without an eviction on her record.

Maria has since moved into her new apartment. She is extremely grateful for the support and guidance she received from her MWLS attorney, which prevented her family from facing eviction and homelessness.

Maria is just one of the individuals helped by attorneys in more than 700 cases that were opened in just six months under the Access to Counsel Program.

MLAC is grateful for the Massachusetts Legislature's investment in this life-changing program. We look forward to continued success as we work to increase housing stability and prevent evictions in Fiscal Year 2026 and beyond.

MLAC
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