Civil Legal Aid in Housing

MLAC
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation

Line Item 0321-1600

Housing remains the highest area of need for civil legal aid services. Housing preservation, stabilization, and eviction/record-sealing continue as top priorities. In FY25, 35% of civil legal aid cases in Massachusetts were housing cases.

Rising costs, limited housing availability, and pressure on the state's shelter system are causing significant housing challenges for Massachusetts residents. Civil legal aid helps keep people with low incomes safely and stably housed.

Legal Aid helps preserve and secure access to safe and affordable housing by:

- Defending clients from unlawful eviction
- Combating housing discrimination
- Protecting tenants at risk of losing housing subsidies
- Helping people obtain rental assistance
- Enforcing health, safety, and accessibility standards
- Advocating for access to affordable housing

Civil legal aid is an essential service for people living in poverty. Households with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty line ($41,250 annually for a family of four or $19,950 for an individual in 2026) qualify to receive these civil legal services.

The percentage of Massachusetts residents living in what is defined as "extreme poverty" (incomes below 50% of the federal poverty line; $16,500 annually for a family of four or $7,980 for an individual in 2026) is increasing. According to the latest census data, more than 336,700 people in our state live in extreme poverty – that's 39% of the population already eligible for civil legal aid.

9,538

housing cases were closed in FY25, including cases involving:

- **4,375** Private landlord/tenant disputes
- **3,212** Federally subsidized housing issues
- **953** Public housing issues
- **134** Housing discrimination
- **73** Foreclosures/predatory lending practices
- **58** Homeownership
- **721** Other issues (including unsafe/ unhealthy living conditions in rental units)

Federal funding cuts and strict eligibility changes threaten access for Massachusetts low income families who rely on housing choice vouchers known as Section 8.

As of September 2025, more than 92,000 Massachusetts households rely on housing choice vouchers, equivalent to one in eleven Massachusetts renter households.

Civil legal aid is needed now more than ever to help people navigate new federal policy and eligibility rules, appeal denials of subsidized housing and vouchers, and find ways to supplement decreasing rental assistance to prevent eviction and homelessness.

NATALIA'S STORY

Natalia *(name changed for privacy)*, a single mother raising two daughters, uses a voucher to rent her apartment. She was confused when she received an eviction notice from her local housing authority. Natalia found out that the authority had improperly calculated her rent due to an income error.

Natalia followed procedure and requested an extension for her court date. The trial judge denied her request.

Northeast Legal Aid's Housing Court Emergency Team was able to take quick action. Within 24 hours of Natalia contacting them, an attorney filed an appeal on her behalf, and the judge paused the eviction to give Natalia enough time to rectify her situation with the housing authority. She and her daughters were able to remain stably housed thanks to civil legal aid.

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