

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

House of Representatives

State House, Boston 02133-1054

Representative Brian S. Dempsey, Chairman
House Committee on Ways & Means
Room 243, State House
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Stephen Kulik, Vice Chair
House Committee on Ways & Means
Room 238, State House
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Viriato Manuel deMacedo
Room 124, State House
Boston, MA 02133

June 12, 2014

Dear House Conference Committee Members,

We are in support of including language to expand the Housing Court throughout the Commonwealth as part of the budget conference report. Housing Courts provide the Commonwealth with a special legal forum with specific expertise in housing to settle disputes. Most of the state already has a Housing Court.

We have seen during recent sessions multiple members of the legislature put measures forward to expand the Housing Court: House bills 1671 and 1420 and Senate bill 695 are currently in the legislative process and would expand the housing courts to Framingham, Lexington, Chelsea, Winthrop and Revere. There is also pending before the General Court, "An Act relative to the geographical jurisdiction of the Housing Court Department," which would expand the Court's jurisdiction to all of the areas currently unserved.

We believe that making the Housing Court system available to all Massachusetts residents regardless of where they live will not only alleviate pressure from district courts, but also give residents a better outlet to resolve problems quickly and cost effectively. Furthermore, these courts are set up to efficiently respond to emergencies, as well as building, fire, zoning, and sanitary code violations. In addition, Housing Courts provide access to services, financial assistance, and programs that help landlords and tenants stabilize tenancies and from an economic standpoint the Housing Court has the lowest cost per case across all Trial Court Departments.

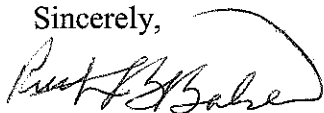
In the FY15 budget the Senate adopted a redrafted Amendment S118 to provide the Cape and Islands with a Housing Court. This is a good start, but we ask that the original Amendment S118, which provided all unserved areas with a Housing Court be adopted by the conference committee. The precedent for this is the Hampden Housing Court expansion which during the FY2000 became the Western Mass Housing Court. No funds are being sought for this expansion in the FY15 budget.

The Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission suggests, as in the original Amendment S118, that the expansion of housing courts to unserved areas can be achieved by expanding the existing five divisions and adding a sixth.

Over thirty organizations have pledged their support for statewide housing court expansion, including the Massachusetts Health Officers Association, Fire Prevention Association of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Municipal Lawyer's Association, and Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. They are calling for the legislature to provide that all citizens have access to an efficient and trustworthy housing court.

We ask that you consider an expansion of the Housing Courts favorably due to their importance to the Commonwealth and its residents and support the original Amendment S118 in conference.


Sincerely,




Ruth B. Balsler
12th Middlesex




Jay Barrows
5th Bristol




Paul A. Brodeur
32nd Middlesex




Thomas P. Conroy
13th Middlesex




Edward F. Coppinger
10th Suffolk




Claire Cronin
11th Plymouth




Mark J. Cusack
5th Norfolk




Marjorie Decker
25th Middlesex



Shawn Dooley
9th Norfolk



Paul J. Donato
35th Middlesex



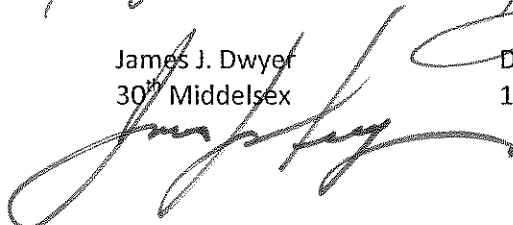
James J. Dwyer
30th Middlesex



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3rd Middlesex

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6th Suffolk

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5th Barnstable

Jay Kaufman
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Frank I. Smizik
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16th Suffolk

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