

HOUSE No. 1537

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

David M. Rogers and Michael S. Day

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act establishing a right to counsel in certain eviction cases.

PETITION OF:

| NAME: | DISTRICT/ADDRESS: |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>David M. Rogers</i> | <i>24th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Michael S. Day</i> | <i>31st Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Kevin G. Honan</i> | <i>17th Suffolk</i> |
| <i>Tricia Farley-Bouvier</i> | <i>3rd Berkshire</i> |
| <i>Mike Connolly</i> | <i>26th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Christine P. Barber</i> | <i>34th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Brian M. Ashe</i> | <i>2nd Hampden</i> |
| <i>James B. Eldridge</i> | <i>Middlesex and Worcester</i> |
| <i>Marjorie C. Decker</i> | <i>25th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Antonio F. D. Cabral</i> | <i>13th Bristol</i> |
| <i>Kay Khan</i> | <i>11th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>James M. Kelcourse</i> | <i>1st Essex</i> |
| <i>Michelle M. DuBois</i> | <i>10th Plymouth</i> |
| <i>Mary S. Keefe</i> | <i>15th Worcester</i> |
| <i>Denise Provost</i> | <i>27th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Tommy Vitolo</i> | <i>15th Norfolk</i> |
| <i>Joseph W. McGonagle, Jr.</i> | <i>28th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Marcos A. Devers</i> | <i>16th Essex</i> |

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|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Daniel J. Hunt</i> | <i>13th Suffolk</i> |
| <i>Natalie M. Higgins</i> | <i>4th Worcester</i> |
| <i>Brendan P. Crighton</i> | <i>Third Essex</i> |
| <i>Denise C. Garlick</i> | <i>13th Norfolk</i> |
| <i>Patricia D. Jehlen</i> | <i>Second Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Carlos Gonzalez</i> | <i>10th Hampden</i> |
| <i>Harold P. Naughton, Jr.</i> | <i>12th Worcester</i> |
| <i>Mindy Domb</i> | <i>3rd Hampshire</i> |
| <i>Aaron Vega</i> | <i>5th Hampden</i> |
| <i>Andres X. Vargas</i> | <i>3rd Essex</i> |
| <i>Diana DiZoglio</i> | <i>First Essex</i> |
| <i>Natalie M. Blais</i> | <i>1st Franklin</i> |
| <i>Paul W. Mark</i> | <i>2nd Berkshire</i> |
| <i>Russell E. Holmes</i> | <i>6th Suffolk</i> |
| <i>Daniel J. Ryan</i> | <i>2nd Suffolk</i> |
| <i>Bud L. Williams</i> | <i>11th Hampden</i> |
| <i>Jack Patrick Lewis</i> | <i>7th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>David Henry Argosky LeBoeuf</i> | <i>17th Worcester</i> |
| <i>Harriette L. Chandler</i> | <i>First Worcester</i> |
| <i>Ruth B. Balsler</i> | <i>12th Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Sean Garballey</i> | <i>23rd Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Nika C. Elugardo</i> | <i>15th Suffolk</i> |
| <i>Cindy F. Friedman</i> | <i>Fourth Middlesex</i> |
| <i>Joan Meschino</i> | <i>3rd Plymouth</i> |
| <i>Lindsay N. Sadosa</i> | <i>1st Hampshire</i> |
| <i>Tram T. Nguyen</i> | <i>18th Essex</i> |

HOUSE No. 1537

By Messrs. Rogers of Cambridge and Day of Stoneham, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 1537) of David M. Rogers and others establishing a right to counsel in certain eviction cases. The Judiciary.

[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION
SEE HOUSE, NO. 3589 OF 2017-2018.]

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-First General Court
(2019-2020)**

An Act establishing a right to counsel in certain eviction cases.

Whereas, The deferred operation of this act would tend to defeat its purpose, which is to provide forthwith indigent persons with the right to counsel in certain eviction cases, therefore it is hereby declared to be an emergency law, necessary for the immediate preservation of the public convenience.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 239 of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the
2 following 3 sections:-

3 Section 14. For purposes of sections 15 and 16 the following terms shall, unless the
4 context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:-

5 “Committee”, the civil justice committee established pursuant to section 15.

6 “Covered proceeding”, a proceeding resulting from: (i) an action brought pursuant to
7 section 1A or (ii) an action brought pursuant to this chapter by a person to recover land or
8 tenements based on the following: (a) the lessee of land or tenements or a person holding under
9 him holds possession without right after the determination of a lease by its own limitation or by
10 notice to quit or otherwise; (b) a mortgage of land has been foreclosed by a sale under a power
11 therein contained or otherwise; or (c) a tax title has been foreclosed by decree of the land court.

12 “Designated organization”, an organization that provides legal counsel and is identified
13 and designated by the civil justice committee pursuant to section 15.

14 “Eligible individual”, a party in a covered proceeding who is an indigent: (i) tenant or
15 occupant of a rental dwelling or dwelling unit, the owner and occupant of a dwelling unit owned
16 as a condominium, or the owner and occupant of a 1-family or 2-family dwelling where such
17 dwelling unit or dwelling is located in the commonwealth; or (ii) owner or lessor of a rental
18 dwelling or dwelling unit where such dwelling unit or dwelling is located in the commonwealth.

19 “Indigent”, a person who is:

20 (i) receiving public assistance pursuant to: (1) aid to families with dependent children
21 pursuant to chapter 118; (2) the emergency aid program for elderly and disabled residents
22 pursuant to section 1 of chapter 117A; (3) a veterans’ benefits program; (4) Title XVI of the
23 federal Social Security Act; (5) food stamps; (6) refugee resettlement benefits; or (7) medicaid,
24 pursuant to 42 U.S.C. section 1396, et seq.;

25 (ii) earning an income, after taxes, that is 125 per cent or less of the current poverty
26 threshold established annually by the Community Services Administration pursuant to section
27 625 of the Federal Economic Opportunity Act, as amended; or

28 (iii) unable to pay the fees and costs of the covered proceeding in which the person is a
29 party or is unable to do so without depriving said person or said person's dependents of the
30 necessities of life, including food, shelter and clothing; provided, however that an inmate in a
31 correctional facility shall not be adjudged indigent unless the inmate has complied with the
32 procedures set forth in section 29 of chapter 261 and the court finds that the inmate is incapable
33 of making payments under the plans set forth in said section 29 of said chapter 261.

34 "Legal counsel" or "counsel", means a lawyer licensed to practice law in the
35 commonwealth.

36 Section 15. (a) There shall be established within the executive office of housing and
37 economic development, but not under its control, a state agency known as the civil justice
38 committee. The committee shall consist of 7 members appointed by the governor, 2 of whom
39 shall be representatives from the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission, 3 of whom shall
40 be representatives from the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation and 2 of whom shall be
41 representatives from the committee for public counsel services. The committee shall be
42 responsible for establishing and implementing a program for the provision of legal services to
43 eligible individuals with respect to covered proceedings.

44 The committee or its designee shall identify and designate organizations eligible to
45 provide legal counsel in accordance with this section and section 16; provided, however the
46 committee shall only designate organizations that:

47 (i) operate pursuant to the standards contained in section 4, Standards for Relations with
48 Clients, and section 6, Standards for Quality Assurance, of the Standards for Providers of Civil
49 Legal Aid established by the American Bar Association;

50 (ii) maintain its principal purpose as furnishing free or low-cost legal services to persons
51 who are unable to afford private legal counsel;

52 (iii) has substantial expertise in housing law and landlord and tenant law and relevant
53 experience in representing low-income tenants in the civil courts of the commonwealth; or

54 (iv) satisfy other criteria established by the civil justice committee.

55 (b) The committee shall establish procedures for the monitoring of the services provided
56 pursuant to this section and section 16 to ensure that designated organizations are providing
57 competent legal services and shall annually review the performance of designated organizations;
58 provided, however, that the committee may decline to renew the designation of any such
59 organization.

60 (c) The committee shall require each designated organization to identify the geographic
61 areas from which the organization shall represent eligible individuals, and for each geographic
62 area, shall maintain a list of such organizations that shall represent such individual.

63 (d) An organization designated by the civil justice committee pursuant to this section
64 shall not be considered to be or have any rights as a state employee.

65 (e) The committee may promulgate any rules or regulations necessary to implement this
66 section or section 16.

67 Section 16. (a) The civil justice committee shall immediately assign a designated
68 organization to represent an eligible individual upon receipt of a request for such services from:

69 (i) the eligible individual;

70 (ii) a judge to whom a covered proceeding has been assigned; or

71 (iii) such designated organization.

72 (b) The designated organization shall assign specific legal counsel to provide legal
73 services to the eligible individual for the covered proceeding.

74 (c) The committee shall cause legal counsel to be paid \$50 per hour for representation of
75 an eligible individual pursuant to this section. The civil justice committee shall review the rate of
76 compensation periodically.

77 (d) The committee shall set an annual cap on billable hours not in excess of 1,650 hours.
78 Counsel appointed or assigned to represent an eligible individual shall not be paid for any time
79 billed in excess of the annual limit of billable hours. It shall be the responsibility of the counsel
80 appointed or assigned to represent an eligible individual to manage their billable hours. Any
81 counsel who is appointed or assigned to represent an eligible individual shall be prohibited from
82 accepting any new appointment or assignment to represent indigents after that counsel has billed
83 1,350 billable hours during any fiscal year.

84 SECTION 2. The members of the civil justice committee established in section 15 of
85 chapter 239 of the General Laws shall be appointed within 90 days of the effective date of this
86 act.

87 SECTION 3. Section 16 of chapter 239 of General Laws shall take effect 180 days after
88 the effective date of this act.