



Massachusetts has a housing crisis, and Governor Baker's "Housing Choices" bill is not the solution

Homes for All Massachusetts is outraged at the prospect of our state government rushing to pass Governor Baker's "Housing Choices" bill while taking no action to help those hit hardest by the housing crisis: working class people, lower-income households, and communities of color.

People across Massachusetts are suffering because of out of control housing costs and a lack of affordable homes, and many neighborhoods are being torn apart by evictions and displacement. Yet the governor and some in the Legislature are fixated on a housing bill that completely fails to address these problems.

The governor's bill paves the way for developers to build more housing, but does nothing¹ to ensure that new projects include truly affordable apartments. Making it easier for local governments to change zoning rules and for real estate developers to gain approval for projects might spur creation of some new housing, but the vast majority of it will be far too expensive to help deal with the actual crisis of unaffordability and displacement.

In many parts of our state, the bill could actually worsen the crisis by helping to usher in a new wave of luxury developments that will [intensify gentrification](#) and [lead to displacement](#) of existing residents, businesses, and community institutions.

The experience of cities here and across the country shows that "production" alone is not the answer to our housing crisis. The idea that building luxury housing will help all of us sounds a little like the "trickle down" theory sometimes used to justify tax cuts for the rich, and it is just as false. After years of rapid development in Boston, the city has out-of-control rents and an enormous displacement crisis. "Production" is no panacea for residents of smaller cities either. In Lynn, for example, plans for three large new projects will create 2,000 new units, a [gated community](#), and not a single affordable apartment.

As a coalition of groups that organize working class, low and moderate income tenants and homeowners, we are on the front lines of our state's housing crisis. Behind the [alarming](#) statistics on [cost burden](#), [evictions](#), and [shortages](#) of [affordable housing](#) are the people and communities we work with every day.

For us, this crisis is about [elders](#) being forced out of neighborhoods they helped build; it's about parents having less time with their children because they are working second and third jobs to keep up with rent; it's about multiple families living crammed into one apartment; it's about people trapped in abusive domestic situations because they can't afford to move; it's about homelessness; it's about patients suffering from terrible [physical and mental health](#) issues created or exacerbated by housing instability; it's about people losing communal ties and support when they are displaced; it's about students having trouble in school because of stress over eviction; it's about people of color being disproportionately harmed by gentrification; it's about communities losing culture and character; and it's about neighborhoods losing social capital and cohesion.

In the face of these kinds of harm – which have long lasting, often irreversible impacts on individuals and communities – we need an urgent and comprehensive response that includes tenant protections to stem the tide of evictions and displacement; real affordability requirements for new projects; drastic increases in funding for affordable housing, homelessness prevention, rental assistance, civil legal assistance, and tenant organizing; support for alternative housing models such as community

land trusts and limited equity co-ops; and reforms to allow cities and towns to implement local measures² such as real estate transfer fees, "just cause" eviction protections,³ and [rent control](#).

The Governor's bill is clearly not the solution we need. In prioritizing profit-driven production of luxury housing and failing to address the needs of lower-income communities, the governor's bill seems closer in spirit to the [Trump administration's](#) "opportunity zone" [approach](#) to development than to the progressive policies Massachusetts needs.

However, zoning reform could be one part of a strong response to the housing crisis if it is genuinely aligned with concerns for social, economic, and racial justice and if it is coupled with measures that ensure affordability, promote fair housing, prevent displacement, and enable municipalities to take action.⁴ It would be a betrayal of our communities to pass the governor's bill without substantive amendments and without these companion measures.

We reject the idea of passing the governor's bill quickly and then dealing with additional measures to address the housing crisis later. History leads us to believe that if a "production bill" supported by wealthy interests is passed on its own, progressive reforms that directly assist working class, low- and moderate-income people will likely be left to languish. And as pointed out by [Metro Housing Boston](#), open land is scarce in many areas and luxury developments enabled by the governor's bill will foreclose the possibility of more equitable approaches for the parcels where they are built.

Instead, let's work together on a serious response to the housing crisis with leadership from the people most directly impacted, and with the goal of securing the human right to safe, dignified, and affordable housing for all residents of our Commonwealth.

Alternatives for Community and Environment*

Arise for Social Justice*

Asian American Workshop

Asian Community Development Corp

Boston Tenant Coalition*

The Chelsea Collaborative

Chinatown Community Land Trust*

Chinese Progressive Association*

City Life/Vida Urbana*

Community Labor United

ECCO (Essex County Community Organization)

Franklin County Continuing the Political
Revolution

Keeping Codman Affordable

Lynn United for Change*

Massachusetts Jobs with Justice

New England United for Justice*

OUTNOW

Pioneer Valley Resist Coalition

Pioneer Valley Workers Center

Progressive Massachusetts

Reclaim Roxbury

Right to the City Boston*

Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals Local 4098

Springfield No One Leaves*

Tenants for a Livable Arlington

Western Mass SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice)

* Denotes HFA-Mass member groups. Homes For All is a national network of base-building groups working in solidarity to protect, defend, and expand housing that is truly affordable and dignified for low-income and very low-income communities by engaging those most directly impacted by this crisis through local and national organizing.

¹ In a few specific circumstances, the bill does require inclusion of a small number of homes for people at 80% of Area Median Income (AMI). That leaves out most people who need help, and there is actually not a major lack of housing [in the 80% AMI segment](#). Under the governor's proposal, apartments in Greater Boston with rents set to be manageable for a family of four making [over \\$80,000 per year](#) meet the requirement for inclusion of "affordable" housing. That's not really affordable, and this bill is not a solution to the crisis.

² There is currently a statewide ban on local rent control measures. In order to implement other local measures such as real estate transfer fees and just cause eviction protections, municipal governments must obtain permission from the state government through the onerous "home rule" process. That process essentially gives state legislators from across the Commonwealth veto power over local initiatives. A recent example is the Jim Brooks Stabilization Act, an extremely modest attempt to address displacement that was adopted by the Boston City Council, endorsed by Mayor Walsh, and [killed on Beacon Hill](#) without a vote from the full Legislature.

³ "Just cause" rules prevent "no-fault" evictions in which tenants are evicted without reason and despite being up to date on rent.

⁴ It would be particularly absurd to make it easier for municipal governments to permit luxury developments while maintaining the restrictive status quo when it comes to local initiatives to help lower-income households.