

Civil Legal Aid in Housing



Line Item 0321-1600

Civil legal aid is an essential service for people who face housing insecurity, including eviction and foreclosure. A significant percentage of civil legal aid cases involve complex housing issues that can mean the difference between retaining housing and facing homelessness for Massachusetts residents. In FY22, legal aid organizations saw a 26% increase in federally subsidized housing cases and a 23% increase in private landlord/tenant cases. The expiration of COVID-19 eviction moratoria, significant changes to rental assistance programs, and rising rents continue to put families with low incomes at risk for displacement.

Legal aid helps protect access to safe and affordable housing by:

- Enforcing the health, safety, and accessibility standards of rental units
- Protecting tenants at risk of losing housing subsidies
- Helping place vulnerable people and families in emergency shelters
- Advocating for access to affordable housing
- Helping people obtain rental assistance
- Defending clients from unlawful evictions and foreclosures and combating housing discrimination

\$126 million in estimated economic benefits were provided by civil legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including **\$19.8 million** in shelter savings.

10,258 housing cases were closed in FY22, including cases involving:

5,425 Private Landlord/Tenant Disputes

2,970 Federally Subsidized Housing Issues

797 Public Housing Issues

250 Housing Discrimination

76 Foreclosures/Predatory Lending Practices

59 Homeownership/Real Property

People and families with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$37,500 per year for a family of four; \$18,225 for an individual) qualify for civil legal aid.



Daisy* uses a housing subsidy to help afford rent in her gentrifying Boston neighborhood. After her landlord increased the size of her apartment by connecting it to the basement, he demanded she pay more. But Daisy's voucher did not cover the cost of the larger space. When she fell behind on rent, the landlord filed for eviction. In addition to displacement, an eviction record can jeopardize eligibility for subsidies.

A **De Novo** attorney represented Daisy in mediation over the course of a year and convinced the landlord to dismiss the eviction case. This allowed Daisy to retain her subsidy and move her family to a more affordable unit in their neighborhood.

*Name changed for privacy