

# Civil Legal Aid in Housing



Line Item 0321-1600

Civil legal aid helps keep Massachusetts residents with low incomes safely and stably housed. It serves as a lifeline for people facing serious threats to maintaining their housing. Housing is the most common type of civil legal aid case and demand has been steadily rising since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Housing cases increased by 20% during FY21-23, compared to the three-year period of FY18-20.

**Civil legal aid is an essential part of the Commonwealth’s solution to the housing crisis.**

**Legal Aid helps secure 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
- Combating housing discrimination by upholding Fair Housing laws and regulations

People and families with incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$39,000 per year for a family of four; \$18,825 for an individual) qualify for civil legal aid.

**10,501** housing cases were closed in FY23, including cases involving:

**5,478** Private Landlord/Tenant Disputes

**3,127** Federally Subsidized Housing Issues

**892** Public Housing Issues

**193** Housing Discrimination

**70** Foreclosures/Predatory Lending Practices

**741** Other

## Legal Aid: A Sound Investment

Nearly **\$100 million** in economic benefits were provided by civil legal aid to the Commonwealth and its residents last year, including more than **\$14.7 million** in avoided shelter savings for families and individuals.



**Julia** (name changed for privacy) was forced to find emergency, temporary housing for herself and her baby daughter when her landlord refused to comply with health code orders and make much-needed repairs to her unit. Julia called her local legal aid organization for help.

Her attorney discovered the landlord was attempting to sell the property in a hurry and had no plan to compensate Julia. After lengthy negotiations, the attorney secured a settlement that got Julia a substantial payout and the restoration of her tenancy at the newly repaired building, which is also under new ownership.