



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Housing
In Support of H.1111 – An Act Relative to Housing Production
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports H.1111, An Act Relative to Housing Production, as a significant step to increase the stock of housing affordable for low- and moderate-income families and individuals. Housing options in the bill would better meet the needs of our citizens, specifically by creating many more multi-family rental units located close to transportation and services.

The League is particularly concerned that efforts to place homeless families in appropriate housing are hampered by lack of rental housing at levels that match the resources families have to put toward rent. A significant contributing factor to homelessness is the rising cost of housing, particularly in areas where the economy has been producing jobs, leading to a higher demand for housing. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) report, “Out of Reach 2015,” shows that it takes wages of \$24.64 per hour (working 40 hours per week year round) to rent a modest two-bedroom apartment in Massachusetts and \$28.73 in the Boston-Cambridge-Quincy metro area. Therefore, it is not surprising that so many people find affordable options unavailable and lose the struggle to pay rent and other housing costs.

Consequently, thousands of families now live in shelters and motels, enduring unhealthy and stressful environments for periods that drag on for months and sometimes years. Children living in such environments for long periods show more health problems and do not perform as well in school which leads to higher health care, education and unemployment costs for the Commonwealth. The testimony of families who have moved to their own apartments from shelters is gratifying and inspiring, even when it is only what most of us deem the bare minimum – a bed of one’s own, cooking facilities, a table for eating and study, and a place to put one’s possessions.

In recent years the housing market, in conjunction with our land use policies, has been skewed to produce single family homes or high-priced urban condominiums beyond the reach of most people. In addition to families, younger workers just getting started and paying off student loans also need modest rental units that are hard to come by. Our future-oriented businesses and the state as a whole cannot afford to discourage young, educated workers from living here because of the lack of suitable housing. Another group often ready for multi-family rental housing are the retired couples and individuals who want to leave their single family homes and locate closer to transit and city and town centers. Good options for them would expand the home ownership market for the younger generation. As a result, increasing the stock of multi-family rentals would better meet the housing needs of two growing segments of the Massachusetts population, young singles and retiring elders.

H.1111 is a comprehensive bill that opens options on many fronts. The League commends the principle that communities across the state should share in the effort to substantially increase the

number of multi-family housing units, because the people who want this housing live and work in every town and city. New businesses are being established around the state and employees are better off living close to their jobs. Older folks often want to stay in the same community when they sell their homes. There is a substantial benefit when land use zones exist for multi-family buildings or cluster developments where developers can proceed by right instead of committing to a lengthy process of obtaining special permits. We also commend the bill's inclusion of appropriate safeguards for natural resource protection and a mechanism for school-cost reimbursement, which should alleviate fears of unsustainable growth. We appreciate the measures in the bill that provide for additional data gathering and planning. It is important especially for the state to assist smaller communities with access to information and analysis of workable options that they would have difficulty producing on their own. We see housing production as a statewide issue that is best addressed by the approach that we are all in this together.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts strongly urges the members of this Committee to vote to support this legislation and work to have it implemented in the current session.

Thank you for your consideration.