



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Housing  
In Support of H.1288/S.775, An Act relative to housing reform  
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports H.1288/S.775, An Act relative to housing reform. This bill is a significant encouragement to build more housing that is affordable for more of our population and that will alleviate the extreme shortage of housing for low- and moderate-income residents. The emphasis on multifamily housing close to MBTA bus and rail service will make better use of expensive land and leverage local and state-funded transportation resources.

There must be a change in the statewide framework for housing production to house everyone and to meet the needs of a population that is increasingly looking for modestly-priced apartments and houses, both for rental and ownership. The time is right for changes in zoning practices to incentivize building homes for the whole spectrum of the population, not just for developers' profits.

The League is very concerned about the large numbers of families and individuals who are homeless. For decades the Commonwealth of Massachusetts budget has included substantial funds to take care of people who are homeless. We support continuing this effort at a level to provide housing to all in need. A significant contributing factor to homelessness is the rising cost of housing, particularly in areas where the economy has been producing jobs. No matter how much is added to the state's budget for assistance to the homeless and for subsidized units, we can't win this battle to house our people until we add more affordable housing units through the ordinary construction market.

We stress that housing production is an issue that affects our population in general, not just those in crisis. Younger workers just getting started and paying off student loans need modest rental units that are currently hard to find. 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. Also often ready for multifamily rental housing are 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. Increasing the stock of multifamily housing would, therefore, better meet the needs of two growing segments of the Massachusetts population, young singles and retiring elders.

We believe the current housing needs in Massachusetts justify appropriately lowering barriers to development. This can be done while conserving the environment and building resources that enhance our communities. H.1288/S.775 provides for zoning amendments that favor multifamily housing, accessory apartments and open space residential developments to be passed by simple majorities of a community's legislative body instead of by two-thirds votes. MBTA communities are expected to facilitate more housing in order to receive some state grants. Many other provisions ease zoning requirements (such as lot sizes and parking) that currently limit building modest housing units. Moving in the direction of Smart Growth zoning across our communities is the best option for a shared solution to our state's housing crisis.



The League recognizes that other bills proposed for this legislative session have similar provisions and that there may be somewhat different solutions that will appropriately address the housing dilemma we face. However, we urge the Committee to adopt a final bill that carries the main principles of H.1288/S.775.

The League, which represents 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, urges the Joint Committee on Housing to report this bill favorably and quickly out of committee as the next step to address the Commonwealth's housing problem and to secure enactment this session.