



Massachusetts Housing Coalition

Restoring Racial & Social Justice in Housing Petition

Massachusetts must finally face the reality that inequality is woven into the very fabric of our lives. The murder of George Floyd has sparked an incredible movement to eliminate racial and social injustices all around the United States. As the Black Lives Matter movement has swelled to become the single largest, organized protest in modern history, we must all do our part maintain the momentum this important moment in history has created.

Black Lives Matter is inspiring real change, but it is the choices we make in Massachusetts that will ultimately make those changes meaningful and lasting.

We must do our part. We must do whatever we can to solve racial and social injustice in the Commonwealth.

We believe the best place to start is with our housing policies.

Barriers to property ownership and rental availability are some of the oldest ways of preserving discrimination in Massachusetts. In fact, [a recent study by Suffolk University](#) paired prospective white renters with prospective black renters to illustrate the egregious discriminatory practices that still exist in our communities. In an absurd 71% of these test cases, the race of the prospective renter was a direct cause of discrimination. White renters were shown more properties and given preferential treatment with access to discounts, while Black renters were often ignored, shown fewer apartments, or were not offered similar discounts.

This is simply unacceptable. Clearly, our current laws are doing little to solve the decades-old problem of housing discrimination.

We know that there is no panacea. We have a lot of work ahead of us to solve the racial and social injustices that are woven into the fabric of our lives.

But we must start somewhere. Help us be the change we need to see in Massachusetts.

Why Should I Sign the “Restoring Racial & Social Justice in Housing Petition”?

By signing your name, we will show our elected officials that residents will fight for real change in Massachusetts. With your support, our petition will:

FIGHT to stop discriminatory zoning practices and remove housing barriers that exacerbate racial and social injustice

FIGHT to stop discriminatory zoning practices and remove housing barriers that exacerbate racial and social injustice

FIGHT to address housing instability and income inequality to create better opportunities for all residents

FIGHT to create more affordable homes utilizing 40B's, 40R's, and inclusionary building permits that mandate that all new housing units include affordable units

By lending your voice to our movement, we can all speak as one to demand that racial and social justice be taken seriously in every corner of our state.

Help fight for the change we need in Massachusetts by signing your name today!

Who is MHC?

The Massachusetts Housing Coalition (MHC) is a non-profit organization formed by tenants, homeowners, small business owners, and property owners who believe addressing our housing crisis in Massachusetts with the same old policy ideas only worsens the quality of life in our state while doing nothing to address skyrocketing costs and displacement of residents.

By tearing down the artificial barriers to housing created by the failed policies of the 20th Century, our organization is leading the fight to stop Not In My Backyard (NIMBY)-ism from further crippling our municipalities and demanding that our state finally build more housing where it is needed the most.

Join us by signing this petition or become a member of MHC at <https://www.masshousingcoalition.org>

Make sure to follow us on Facebook and join our Housing NOW Facebook Group

What Does the Restoring Racial & Social Justice in Housing Petition Say?

We, the citizens and residents of Massachusetts, petition the Governor, the Great and General Court, and all 351 incorporated municipalities of the Commonwealth to respectfully demand that the Commonwealth and its municipalities deliberate in each of their respective administrative and legislative bodies the following principles and policy changes; determine the method and manner that such principles and policy changes can be implemented within their jurisdiction with all due speed; and make publicly available the results of such deliberations as soon as practicable.

Stop the Legacy of Discrimination

Throughout the 20th Century our governments, our leaders, and even our own neighbors, successfully wrote discrimination into our laws, regulations, and business practices.

While these policies have been dismantled, their legacy of injustice still carries on. In fact, a [recent study by Suffolk University](#) showed that discriminatory barriers to property ownership and rental availability are alive and well in Massachusetts.

By pairing prospective white renters with prospective black renters, the study was able to illustrate the egregious discriminatory practices that still exist in our communities. White renters were shown more properties, offered more discounts, and were given preferential treatment overall. Black renters, on the other hand, often had contact cut off with real estate agents simply for giving a black-sounding name and were only shown a limited number of properties. In an astounding 71% of test cases, the race of a prospective renter was found to be the determine factor in the treatment that was received.

astounding 71% of test cases, the race of a prospective renter was found to be the determine factor in the treatment that was received.

These appalling conditions must come to an end. Clearly, our laws do little, if anything, to address the problem of housing discrimination.

We demand that municipalities throughout the state follow the lead of the Boston City Council and institute real-time data collection on discriminatory practices. Massachusetts must proactively address these egregious practices by demonstrating that discrimination, in any form, will not be tolerated.

We further demand sweeping changes to the systems that we have in place by making current anti-discrimination laws more enforceable. The existence of these laws has evidently stopped no one from continuing their biased housing policies. In order to end discrimination, we must all be accountable through enforcement mechanisms that create significant disincentives for anyone who wishes to continue their discriminatory practices.

Sadly, the social and racial injustice highlighted here isn't the only problem we face. Our own neighbors promote housing injustice as well.

A virulent, Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) mentality in Massachusetts is one of the most harmful movements to our communities. We must stop the hypocrisy of individuals that say they favor affordable housing, but then oppose that same housing in their own communities and neighborhoods.

As a result of this mentality, restrictive and discriminatory zoning laws, regulations, and practices have been put in place to slow down production and has intensified housing inequality and insecurity. We must do better for our residents and for the people that need our laws to work for them, not against them.

NIMBY-ism must come to an end in Massachusetts. Creating more housing is one of the first steps we need to take in order to have a society free of housing injustice and we must create that housing in every neighborhood in the Commonwealth.

End Discriminatory Zoning Regulations

Our zoning policies are deeply rooted in a philosophy of exclusion, dating back to the early 20th Century. Despite the reasonable progress we have made of inclusion and housing equity over the years, our present-day crisis demonstrates the serious inadequacy that still exists in providing housing as a basic need for all people. We must not let the failed policies of the past dictate our future.

Instead of inhibiting construction, zoning ordinances should allow housing to thrive by making it an economically viable and sustainable model for public, non-profit, as well as private interests. A good example of this is the success over the past 25 years of Commonwealth's Chapters 40B and 40R. Unfortunately, municipalities often resist local approval process of 40B's and 40R's, making the process highly costly and difficult for all developers. Not only should we strive to streamline difficult regulations, we seek local zoning changes that make it mandatory to build affordable and workforce housing while also providing economic viability to produce these units by increased density allowances to projects.

Preserving the status quo in current zoning ordinances is what is preventing or own progress in increasing available homes and reducing housing costs. There are several ways that we can break through the status quo, and one such policy that would move the pendulum in the right direction would be Governor Baker's Housing Choice Bill. Cities and towns in Massachusetts that are attempting to do the right thing and allow more housing are being thwarted by outdated laws that require a supermajority vote of their governing bodies to approve zoning changes. The Housing Choice Bill requires a simple majority to pass changes to local zoning – an incremental step that

attempting to do an "right thing" and allow more housing are being thwarted by outdated laws that require a supermajority vote of their governing bodies to approve zoning changes. The Housing Choice Bill requires a simple majority to pass changes to local zoning – an incremental step that Massachusetts must take to loosen the decades-old Not In My Backyard mentality that drives up costs and reduces the availability of housing.

Mitigate Tenant & Landlord Disputes

Many tenants, through no fault of their own, are struggling with rising rents, poor conditions, and irresponsible landlords. There are bad actors in our real estate market and we must find the resources to enforce fairness and penalize those landlords who cause unnecessary and unfair hardship. We believe that Massachusetts must implement a system that can actively mitigate tenant and landlord disputes.

Fairness must be our first principle. For too long, Massachusetts has allowed the benefits of housing to flow to those who can afford it the most. Throughout the 20th Century, the advantages of homeownership and rental relief overwhelmingly favored the well-connected, young, white, college-educated residents who did not need the benefit of scarce government resources. Those who did need those resources were left out. It's time to bring our relief efforts into the twenty-first century and leave behind these unfair and unjust practices.

Tenant protections and assistance should go directly to the neediest among us first. There is no room in our housing policies for allowing those of means to skip to the front of the line and obtain relief ahead of others.

Additionally, we must support and protect those small multifamily homeowners that are acting responsibly and in need of financial and legal support. We recognize that there are those tenants that take advantage of multifamily homeowners and those cases must be addressed in a fair and unbiased mitigation process.

Build, Build, Build

We believe that the next decade in Massachusetts is crucial to creating housing that can be available to all who need it. Without reasonable changes to state and local housing regulations, we risk runaway price increases, limited options to build in areas convenient to job opportunities, and little, if any, housing availability even for those who can afford it today.

We are calling for the Commonwealth to double-down on its commitment to build housing throughout the state by creating 100,000 new units of housing by 2030.

There are numerous options for housing units where market forces have created areas unreachable or unwelcoming to affordable, workforce and even market-rate housing. We must address this inequality head on, understanding that Not In My Backyard (NIMBY)-ism will be a powerful lobby against inclusionary construction in nearly every area of our cities and towns.

Many housing construction methods are underutilized or largely ignored in the housing debate, partially because current zoning creates insurmountable barriers and unpredictable timelines. It is time to look at these types of developments in a new light and with a renewed sense of urgency. Infill projects, for example, are under-valued. These projects would not just be revitalizing old units, but also adding new ones, and would essentially lower prices of market rate units while also creating affordable units. Additionally, focusing on Transit Oriented Development would allow more homes in a wider range of neighborhoods, access to reliable transit and job opportunities, while also lowering carbon emissions.

Brand new units – affordable, workforce and market rate – should be prioritized in every corner of the Commonwealth with the intention of bringing an end to the excuse that the ‘character of a neighborhood’ should stop residents from moving in. With countless ways to create new homes, Massachusetts communities should default to building housing units, instead of searching for thin justifications to prevent them.

