



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
In support of  
Line Item 0321-1800 Access to Counsel  
By Lorelee Stewart, LWVMA Affordable Housing Legislative Specialist  
April 8, 2025**

As one of the 240 members of the Access to Counsel Coalition, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) is committed to continuing the campaign to ensure that it is a permanent and sustainable program. Access to Counsel is about full representation, not limited assistance. It is critical to set Access to Counsel up for success and to set a framework for a stable and sustainable program in motion.

The Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC), which provides funding for civil legal aid, is administering the pilot program. We urge you to make this a priority and increase funding to \$5 Million in the FY26 budget and make the program permanent. While upwards of 90% of landlords are represented, recent Trial Court data shows that over the past two years only 4% of tenants had legal representation. We can change this, prevent homelessness, and stabilize peoples' housing by incrementally building a strong statewide Access to Counsel program.

“My hope is that families do not lose their homes like I did. I hope that together we can build a statewide Access to Counsel Program in a steady way that will make it strong,” said Renee Spencer, LWV Wellesley member, during the Access to Counsel pilot program celebration at La Colaborativa’s Survival Center on October 10. Renee faced eviction unrepresented and spent two years moving from couch to couch.

LWVMA, representing more than 3,000 members in 44 local Leagues across 155 municipalities from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, urges you to make the Access to Counsel program permanent in the FY26 budget by including \$5 million for Line Item 0321-1800.

Thank you for your consideration.