

March 18, 2026

The Honorable Cindy Friedman, Chair
Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions
State House, Room 313
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Alice Peisch, Chair
Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions
State House, Room 234
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in support of petition: *An Act to protect tenants by limiting rent increases (H.5008)*

Chair Friedman, Chair Peisch, and distinguished members of the Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of the petition: *An Act to protect tenants by limiting rent increases (H.5008)*.

[The Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center](http://massbudget.org) (MassBudget) is a 39-year-old non-partisan, nonprofit research and advocacy organization. We provide [rigorous research and policy analysis](#), along with [strategic advocacy](#), in partnership with grassroots organizations. MassBudget has produced extensive research and holds critical expertise in revenue and housing policy, among other public policy areas.

MassBudget supports restrictions on extreme rent increases as part of a comprehensive housing affordability and availability strategy. We strongly believe that a comprehensive strategy should also include increased housing production to meet demand, and investment in affordable housing supply to provide homes for people with low and moderate incomes across the Commonwealth.

Regarding H. 5008, we first want to clarify key points about the function and purpose of the petition before your Committee:

- **First: Rent stabilization does not freeze rental prices.** It aligns allowable rent increases with the cost of living in Massachusetts.
- **Second: Rent stabilization is not intended to be a quick solution to a very complex, multilayered, and difficult problem.** Rent stabilization is mainly intended to restrict extreme rent increases that may result in tenants evictions.
- **Third: The proposed policy, through a ballot question, exempts new construction from adopting this rent stabilization policy for a period of 10 years.** Studies show that rates of new

construction are driven primarily by factors other than the presence or absence of rent stabilization.^{1,2,3}

MassBudget has analyzed the rate of rent increases across Massachusetts in recent years. Our research findings are:

- From 2022 to 2024, the growth in median rents outpaced inflation in 77 percent of legislative districts statewide (153 districts).
- In 48 percent of legislative districts statewide (95 districts), the growth in median rents was more than 150% of the rate of inflation.
- In 20 percent of legislative districts statewide (40 districts), the growth in median rents was double the rate of inflation or more.⁴

Median rent increase as proportion of inflation, 2022-2024	# of Districts
200% or higher	40
150-199%	55
101-149%	58
100% or lower (not faster than inflation)	47

Our research and analysis shows that high rents and housing instability are not just a Boston or an Eastern Massachusetts problem. Rents outpaced inflation in all but one county statewide.⁵ From 2020-2024, the counties with the fastest rent growth (Essex, Bristol, Worcester, and Plymouth) were all located outside of the Boston area.⁶ For example, in 2025, Hampden County had the state’s highest per-capita rate of eviction filings.⁷

The table below shows growth in median rents by county from 2020-2024.

County	Median Rent, 2020	Median Rent, 2024	Percent increase in median rent, 2020-2024	Rent increase as proportion of inflation
Essex	\$1,298	\$1,756	35.29%	1.67x
Bristol	\$934	\$1,245	33.30%	1.57x
Worcester	\$1,074	\$1,426	32.77%	1.55x
Plymouth	\$1,324	\$1,747	31.95%	1.51x
Suffolk	\$1,657	\$2,129	28.49%	1.34x
Middlesex	\$1,714	\$2,201	28.41%	1.34x

Norfolk	\$1,682	\$2,149	27.76%	1.31x
Hampshire	\$1,095	\$1,388	26.76%	1.26x
Nantucket	\$1,781	\$2,213	24.26%	1.14x
Hampden	\$920	\$1,136	23.48%	1.11x
Barnstable	\$1,362	\$1,678	23.20%	1.10x
Franklin	\$959	\$1,177	22.73%	1.07x
Berkshire	\$894	\$1,097	22.71%	1.07x
Dukes	\$1,589	\$1,277	-19.63%	-0.93x

MassBudget supports the petition: *An Act to protect tenants by limiting rent increases (H.5008)* for the following reasons:

- Rapid rent increases have placed an unsustainable burden on our state’s housing safety net.
- Lack of a statewide rent stabilization policy has resulted in an exponential growth in the cost of providing a rental voucher for low-income individuals and families.
- The state has not been able to keep up with the high level of unmet need for housing assistance
- The crisis of affordable housing in Massachusetts is such that in some state regions, even a six-figure income is not enough to comfortably afford rent without a state subsidy.

MassBudget also supports rent stabilization because it adds to the rest of the state’s social safety net, such as food assistance and healthcare services . Households’ prioritization of paying for housing, also known as “the rent eats first,” often leaves families unable to pay for groceries, transportation, postsecondary education, healthcare services or access other basic needs that allow them to be healthy.

The direct and indirect costs of skyrocketing rents are finding their way back to our state budget, putting unsustainable pressure on housing assistance and other vital safety net programs.

We recommend that the committee issues a favorable report for H.5008. Rent stabilization places reasonable restrictions on the predatory practice of extreme rent increases. As part of a multi-part housing strategy, rent stabilization can be a critical tool for keeping Massachusetts residents in their homes and preventing displacement.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Phineas Baxandall
 Director of Research and Policy Analysis
 Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center

Endnotes

¹ Gilderbloom, J.I. and Ye, L. (2007), [Thirty Years Of Rent Control: A Survey Of New Jersey Cities](#). Journal of Urban Affairs, 29: 207-220.

² Sims, David. (2007), [Out of Control: What can we learn from the end of Massachusetts rent control?](#) Journal of Urban Economics, Volume 61, Issue 1, 129-151.

³ Rajasekaran, P. (2019) [Will New Statewide Rent Control Laws Decrease Housing Supply?](#) Urban Institute.

⁴ American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2022-2024. Median Gross Rent (Table B25064) by legislative district, upper and lower chambers.

⁵ The only county where this was not the case was Dukes County.

⁶ American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2020-2024. Median Gross Rent (Table B25064) by county

⁷ Jakovic, M., [Housing Stability Monitor 2025](#). Massachusetts Housing Partnership, August 26, 2025.