



**Metro Housing|Boston's Testimony
Joint Committee on Housing regarding MRVP Codification (H.1305/S.797) by
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Thank you Chairman Honan, Chairman Crighton, and members of the housing committee for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of *An Act Relative to the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program* (H.1305/S.797) on behalf of Metro Housing|Boston.

Metro Housing serves 2,262 households with the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) and supports codifying the program in to the Massachusetts General Laws.

For years, while federal funding for housing has been stagnant, Massachusetts has wisely increased its investment in state vouchers with the MRVP. As I have said to many legislators during my conversations over the past six years, state vouchers have been the only game in town. Hundreds of families who were previously homeless and living in motels and emergency shelters, or at risk of homelessness, or in an unstable living situation now have homes thanks to the MRVP.

Massachusetts led the nation in the development of many housing-related programs, and served as the model for the federal Housing Choice Voucher program. Although the state program – MRVP – has several elements that provide more flexibility, there are two important ways that Metro Housing believes the state program could be amended to better serve families seeking homes in the current market and to help ensure those homes are safe.

First, the program should use current fair market (or even small area) rent standards. Federal voucher values can reach, and in certain cases exceed, the current fair market rent as determined by HUD. However, the MRVP rent levels remain based on rents set in 2005.¹ In today's market, many families need the full 120 days allowed under the rules to find a place they can afford. Although DHCD has approved most, if not all, waivers up to the current FMR when requested via a waiver (for both initial lease ups and rent increases), this market is not going to wait for an administrative waiver process, putting state voucher holders at a disadvantage to all other possible renters.

¹ This will change if the governor signs the language in line-item 7004-9024 contained in the FY'20 budget.

Second, an inspections requirement for homes occupied with state funded vouchers makes sense. Metro Housing conducts more than 18,000 inspections every year to make sure that families with federal vouchers live in safe, secure, and sanitary homes. Apartments are required to be inspected either annually or every other year, depending on the quality and the property owner's history of maintaining apartments. Inspections also happen when a new tenant is about to move in to an apartment, or when a tenant or property owner makes a complaint about the other.

Inspections cover things like checking for working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, fully functioning windows and screens, hot water within an acceptable range, no sign of rodents or insects, kitchen and bathrooms are solid and mold-free, and several other elements. Our inspections also go beyond the regular Board of Health review, checking the basement, common spaces, and exteriors of the buildings for potential health and safety issues. Each of these is something that we want for our own homes.

Property owners often tell us that they appreciate the extra set of eyes on their property because they too want to provide safe and secure homes for their tenants. It is a reasonable additional investment – both in time and money in the form of an increased administration fee for staff time – to inspect properties that are funded with state dollars.

Overall, Metro Housing's position is that the MRVP should be codified to allow for predictability for owners, program participants, and administrators.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Metro Housing asks that the committee report this bill favorably.

Thank you.