



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

MASSACHUSETTS SENATE
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

James B. Eldridge

STATE SENATOR

Middlesex & Worcester District

ROOM 413-A, STATE HOUSE

TEL. (617) 722-1120

**Chair, Joint Committee
on Housing**

Vice Chair, Global Warming and

Climate Change

Committees on Mental Health

and Substance Abuse

& Telecommunications, Utilities

& Energy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

7/25/2014

CONTACT: Megan Montgomery

(617) 722-1120, megan.montgomery@masenate.gov

Senate Passes Local Housing Authority Bill

Senator Eldridge champions bill to provide greater accountability and transparency, establish quality standards and empower tenants

BOSTON – The Senate on Thursday unanimously passed legislation to strengthen requirements of local housing authorities, increase performance management, and encourage innovation in future housing development. There are currently over 240 local housing authorities in Massachusetts.

“This bill takes necessary steps to improve public housing in communities around the state while addressing transparency and accountability at the local level,” said Senator Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Housing. “Over the past year and a half, the Joint Committee on Housing conducted a state-wide tour of housing authorities and held public hearings to hear from directors, tenants, advocates and stakeholders to reach a consensus on how to revitalize and improve public housing authorities. I am pleased that the bill we see today will provide greater transparency and accountability for all housing authorities, while encouraging regionalization and collaboration to improve the delivery of services and hopefully build more public housing across Massachusetts.”

“This bill takes many important steps to increase oversight, strengthen accountability and overall improve the efficiency and quality of our local housing authorities,” Senate President Therese Murray (D-Plymouth) said. “Public housing is relied upon by so many residents in the Commonwealth, including low and moderate-income families, the elderly, veterans, and people with disabilities, and we need to ensure that our local housing authorities are operating according to the interests and well-being of their tenants.”

“This bill will streamline many of the administrative processes of housing authorities throughout the state, and require housing authorities to adopt measures that ensure more transparency,” said Senator Stephen M. Brewer (D-Barre), Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. “It will also allow for more participation by housing authority residents in matters that affect them. Transparency and fairness are essential to a more comfortable living situation, and these reforms will improve the quality of life of those who reside in housing authorities.”

The bill makes every member of a housing or redevelopment authority a fiduciary of the housing authority and requires one of the five members of the housing authority in a town to be a tenant of the housing authority.

It increases training measures by requiring the members of a housing or redevelopment authority to receive biannual training from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) on the proper management of a housing or redevelopment authority. It also requires tenant members and local tenant organizations to receive independent technical assistance training, also by DHCD, to enable full participation in the oversight of the housing authority’s operation and capital planning.

The bill requires DHCD to create three capital assistance teams to provide capital planning and technical assistance, as well as maintenance and repair assistance, to all housing authorities in the Commonwealth. One of the eleven members of the capital assistance team advisory board and one member of the advisory committee for the regional innovation program must have at least five years of experience as the manager of no less than 200 units of privately-owned housing.

Under this bill, DHCD is also required to promulgate guidelines for contracts between a housing authority and an executive director and holds the authority to review all contracts and strike any provision in a contract that does not conform to the guidelines.

Housing authorities are required to participate in a performance-based monitoring program to be established by DHCD and also requires DHCD to develop and provide uniform standards for evaluating housing authority operations. For housing authorities designated as chronically poor performing, DHCD is authorized to appoint a chief administrative and financial officer for oversight.

The bill includes efforts to increase innovation in public housing. It creates a regional public housing innovation program designed to achieve increased coordination and cooperation among several housing authorities, foster innovative models for the development, redevelopment and repair of public housing, and increase economic efficiencies and opportunities.

In addition, it requires capital assistance teams to complete a survey of surplus land owned by DHCD and housing authorities to encourage development of new units of affordable housing, paying special attention to housing opportunities for disabled veterans. The bill also requires DHCD to implement a single statewide centralized waitlist for state-aided public housing.

The bill also:

- Requires housing authorities to post the contact information of members and senior staff in community centers and on a website maintained by the housing authority;
- Requires housing authorities to develop annual plans that are available for public review and comment at a public hearing, stating the housing authority’s goals and objectives to meet or improve upon the department’s performance based review and assessment standards, as well as capital improvement plans and deficiencies to address in meeting performance standards;
- Requires each housing authority to submit to DHCD annual written reports that contain an audited financial statement; and

- Requires the DHCD to establish annual surveys of public housing residents regarding topics including the maintenance and repair of units, the resident's opportunity for participation in housing authority governance and the services provided to the resident.

The Senate and House will now produce a compromise bill for final passage and consideration of the Governor.

###