

Safe Communities Coalition
Promoting Housing Stability and Public Safety

**An Act Providing Housing Rights for Victims of
Domestic Violence, Rape, Sexual Assault and Stalking**

Lead Sponsors: Sen. Cynthia Stone Creem and Rep. Ellen Story

The Problem

No one should have to choose between their safety and keeping or finding housing.

Victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, and stalking in Massachusetts face a crisis in housing stability, homelessness and public safety because of a lack of housing protections.

Victims of these crimes, including children, often lack basic safety options to protect them from the criminal conduct of others.

- Currently, victims cannot terminate a lease, without penalty, to escape from violence and find safety in a new home.
- For many others, staying in their current housing, familiar schools and communities is the safest and most appropriate option yet they often are denied that option when a perpetrator has threatened a parent or child in the home.
- Currently, victims lack the right to have locks changed on their rental property to protect them from further violence.
- Victims and their children crowd our overburdened shelter system when they cannot terminate a lease early, remain safe in their homes, or secure lock changes on their rental units.

The Solution

This bill will help alleviate this crisis by providing rights and protections for victims of these crimes, while protecting the rights of property owners, in the following ways:

- Prevent owners from refusing to rent or renew a lease, or from terminating a tenancy due to reasons related to violence.
- Protect victims from financial penalties of early lease termination for reasons related to violence.
- Prohibit inquiries and disclosure of the tenant's or prospective tenant's status as a victim of these crimes.
- Authorize lock changes to increase safety from violence.

Such protections do not exist in Massachusetts law. Victims in many other states, or involved in federal housing programs, enjoy protections similar to those being proposed, which contribute to safer communities.

This bill balances protections for victims with the rights of property owners so that we all can work together to maintain safe communities in Massachusetts.

To co-sponsor this bill, please contact: Senator Creem's office: (617)722-1639, Michael.Avitzur@masenate.gov; Representative Story's office: (617)722-2012, Brad.Dye@mahouse.gov

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