

Massachusetts eviction protection bill clears committee on party line vote

Matt Murphy

State House News Service

The Joint Committee on Housing voted along party lines Wednesday to recommend a bill that would halt evictions and freeze rents until a year after Gov. Charlie Baker lifts the COVID-19 state of emergency, seeking to keep people hurt economically by the pandemic in their homes. The 14-3 vote sends the Rep. Kevin Honan bill to the House Ways and Means Committee where Honan told the News Service it could be amended based on ongoing negotiations between legislators, the Baker administration and the courts.

A Republican with the power to extend the existing moratorium on evictions, Baker has said he's inclined to let it expire on Oct. 17, but he's talking with judges and others about ways to avoid a housing crisis in the midst of a pandemic. Every Democrat on the committee voted to advance the bill (H 4878), while the two House Republicans – Reps. David DeCoste and Will Crocker – voted no. Sen. Patrick O'Connor of Weymouth, the only GOP senator on the panel, reserved his rights.

The Act to Guarantee Housing Stability would also offer some assistance to small landlords, including allowing property owners with fewer than 15 rental units to pause their mortgages and put missed payments onto the end of the loan. Greater Boston Real Estate Board CEO Greg Vasil said any legislation must include “strong protections and support for both tenants and property owners.”

“Our members and property owners have been working in good faith with tenants to ensure they are safe and that no one has

to leave their homes in the middle of the pandemic. Rather than focusing on an arbitrary and moot eviction moratorium given the existing federal laws, the Legislature should work with advocates and the industry to help bridge the economic hardships being felt throughout the Commonwealth to ensure tenants can stay in their homes and pay their bills while owners can maintain their properties and keep them safe," Vasil said in a statement.