

Report: Eviction Efforts Disproportionately Hitting Communities of Color

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A disproportionate number of eviction filings in Boston involved households of color during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new report published by the housing justice group City Life / Vida Urbana.

By examining Massachusetts Trial Court evictions case data, MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning researcher Ben Walker found that from Feb. 28, 2020 to Feb. 28, 2021, evictions were filed at more than twice the rate in neighborhoods where a majority of renters are people of color than in neighborhoods where most renters are white. Seven out of 10 eviction filings in Boston involved properties in Census tracts where a majority of renters are people of color, though only 47 percent of the city's rental housing is in those neighborhoods, the report found. Tracts where a majority of renters are white hold 43 percent of Boston rental housing and involved 30 percent of eviction filings.

Filing an eviction case is an early step in the process and does not always translate into a removal. Massachusetts had a state moratorium on executing evictions in place from April to October 2020, and a U.S. Centers for Disease Control federal moratorium remains in place through June 30, 2021. Gov. Charlie Baker launched a \$171 million eviction diversion program when he allowed the state moratorium to expire, and a major boost from federal stimulus funds has since pushed the total amount of support available to Massachusetts renters affected by the pandemic to \$968 million. City Life / Vida

Urbana advocated unsuccessfully last year for legislation that would have kept the state moratorium in place alongside a rent freeze for a year beyond the end of the pandemic.

In the report released Thursday, it touted a new bill (H 1434 / S 891) that would again pause no-fault evictions during the state of emergency and recovery, and require landlords to pursue rental assistance before evictions and protect vulnerable tenants from being removed due to COVID-related debts.

“When we fight for housing justice, we’re fighting for racial justice,” Alex Ponte-Capellan, a housing justice organizer with the group, said in a statement. “That’s because evictions disproportionately and unjustly impact Boston’s neighborhoods of color, destabilizing whole communities and pushing families into poverty, physical and mental health struggles, unemployment and often homelessness.”