



**Testimony of Donna Brown**

**Executive Director**

**South Boston Neighborhood  
Development Corporation**

**and**

**Co-Chair**

**MACDC Boston Committee**

**In support of**

**H.4115, An Act authorizing the city of Boston to limit buildings according to their use or construction to specified districts.**

**Joint Committee on Housing**

**December 17, 2019**

Chairman Honan, Chairman Crighton and Members of the Committee, as Co-Chair of MACDC's Boston Committee and as a resident of the City of Boston, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.4115, legislation which makes changes to city of Boston's Linkage program and codifies its existing Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) program into the City's zoning code. I want to express our strong support for this home rule petition.

MACDC represents 20 CDCs in the City of Boston, which collectively have built over 8,000 affordable homes across the city. Our members are governed by residents who serve on their boards of directors. CDCs in Boston are dedicated to long-term affordability, high-quality property management, and robust resident services. We make a strong commitment to hiring firms – contractors and sub-contractors – that are owned by people of color and woman and are committed to hiring community residents and people of color for these construction projects. And, we recycle our developer fees and other earned revenue into further community programming and services.

Boston is a national leader in affordable housing, with over one-third of our rental housing stock reserved for people of low- and moderate-incomes. In total, the city has 54,000 homes with long-term affordability restrictions – a portfolio made possible by years of investment and hard work by many people and institutions. Yet, we know that we have much more work to do.

According to the 2018 update of the City's "Housing Boston 2030" plan, 22% of all Boston households pay more than half their income for housing – of which more than 34,000 are low-income, non-student households. We continue to see rising rents, displacement, and homelessness across the city.

We firmly support Mayor Walsh's goal of creating nearly 16,000 net new affordable homes by 2030. This is an ambitious goal that will require policies, programs, and investments scaled to match the challenge.

It will require significant new resources for Boston to meet this goal. MACDC has been working hard to secure additional support from state government by advocating for a substantial increase in state funding for affordable housing, including an increase in matching funds for the Community Preservation Act. However, we cannot rely on state resources to meet our needs and we certainly can't wait for the Federal Government to return to its historical role in funding affordable housing. Boston must have the tools to generate more revenue itself.

This petition would help us do just that by strengthening two of our most successful programs – the Linkage program and the Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) program.

For more than 30 years, the Linkage program has effectively ensured that downtown development and the growth of our largest institutions also yields benefits for Boston residents and neighborhoods. In total, the program has helped provided \$197 million to leverage over \$3.8 billion in total funding to finance 12,887 units of affordable housing. The Linkage Program also has provided millions of dollars to job training and adult education programs over the years, enabling Boston residents to take advantage of the new jobs being created through these real estate development projects.

Unfortunately, the state law that enabled the Linkage program restricts the ability of the city of Boston to make the adjustments necessary over the course of time. As a result, the program has not kept up with inflation or the changing needs of Boston. This petition would simply enable Boston to control its own destiny and adjust the program as our economy and needs dictate.

Given the strength of our economy and the real estate market, we believe the city of Boston should raise the Linkage fees considerably. Higher fees are also necessary to offset the dramatically rising costs for the construction of affordable housing. Research by a consultant for the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) has demonstrated that the fee can and should be increased significantly.

This home rule petition would also give Boston the authority to incorporate the Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) program into its zoning code. This is critical for the City's future. Currently, when the city of Boston decides to up-zone an area for higher density, it forfeits the ability to require inclusionary units in the new development. This is counterintuitive, and, yet, it is necessary because IDP can only be done through a variance. It is important that Boston will be able to rezone certain neighborhoods as it works to meet our overall housing needs, as well as, prepare and adapt to meet our vulnerability to and exposure for climate change.

Boston must have the ability to implement smart zoning with inclusionary housing requirements. Therefore, we respectfully ask the Committee to report favorably H.4115, granting Boston the legal authority to make such changes to our Linkage and IDP programs, comparable with the rights and abilities as other cities and towns in the Commonwealth.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this home rule petition. We stand ready to work with the Committee, other legislative leadership, and the Administration to move this forward.