

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Office of Housing Stability

Somerville residents served, eviction trends, and the work of preventing displacement.

CALENDAR YEAR 2025 | PUBLISHED 2026

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Mission Statement

The Office of Housing Stability (OHS) works to prevent the involuntary displacement of Somerville residents who are in the process of eviction or at other risk of losing their housing; to rehouse those without stable housing or who otherwise need to relocate; and to support the enactment of policies and the creation of programs to combat displacement and enhance tenant rights.

1. Introduction

Since 2018, the Somerville Office of Housing Stability has worked to enhance tenant rights through policy advocacy and the provision of direct services to Somerville residents facing housing crises. When a tenant receives an eviction notice, an unaffordable rent increase, or experiences a sudden loss of income, OHS connects them with financial assistance, legal help, and supportive services -- intervening before a housing crisis can lead to homelessness and working to prevent displacement from their homes and city wherever possible. OHS also facilitates emergency shelter placements and provides support for residents experiencing homelessness who meet eligibility requirements, including through our hotel/motel program and the State Emergency Assistance Family Shelter program.

In 2025, OHS had a 13-person team (10 full-time and 3 part-time), including intake staff, case managers, and program leadership, that partnered closely with organizations serving the Somerville community including the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS), Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC), De Novo Center for Justice and Healing (De Novo), and Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS) to deliver these services. The office has grown from a staff of 5 in 2019 to meet rising demand, not only for direct services but also for new programs and policies to address displacement.

What This Report Covers

This report covers calendar year 2025. During this period, OHS received **1,185 unique referrals**, and opened **1,047 cases**. Some households are referred more than once, and some referrals are requests for advice made by other service providers rather than individual tenant cases.

Most of these cases represent a household seeking help during a moment of financial uncertainty, a displacement crisis, seeking information about landlord/tenant laws or struggling with how to handle conflict with their landlord or other tenants. While OHS also provides services to owners facing liens or foreclosure, or to landlords seeking information about City landlord/tenant laws or seeking assistance for their tenants, these cases make up only 3% of OHS cases.

The sections that follow describe Somerville's eviction landscape, who sought assistance from OHS, what services were provided, and what outcomes were achieved in partnership with nonprofit organizations. The analysis draws on OHS's case management database, MassCourts eviction data¹ and U.S. Census Bureau data for context².

This report focuses on OHS's direct services work as captured in the case management database. The office's policy advocacy and tenant rights education work, significant components of OHS's mission, are not comprehensively captured in this analysis.

Somerville's Housing Affordability Challenge

Housing is the single biggest financial pressure point for Massachusetts households -- half of state residents say housing costs are unaffordable for their family³. Somerville is no exception. Renters make up roughly 66% of all Somerville households⁴, and many face severe cost burdens that leave little margin for an unexpected expense. According to the 2019-2023 American Community Survey, 17% of Somerville renter households are severely cost-burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing⁵. Among the city's extremely low-income renters, those earning below 30% of Area Median Income, 81% are cost-burdened⁶.

Note: Citywide figures on the share of Somerville households that rent and on rent burden come from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (Tables B25003 and B25070). They are presented here as context and should not be confused with OHS client-level data, which is drawn from the case management database and analyzed in the sections that follow.

2. Somerville's Eviction Landscape

While rent burden and eviction data confirm that housing instability is widespread in Somerville, they also highlight important ways OHS can prevent displacement. OHS outcome data demonstrate that a range of tools, including expert advocacy and housing search, rental startup assistance, tenant organizing, and legal help, can not only mitigate the destabilizing effects of displacement but in many cases improve residents' lives for the long term by helping them move to affordable housing.

¹ MassCourts, Massachusetts Trial Court. *Eviction filings and executions for the city of Somerville.*

² U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2019-2023*

³ WBUR News, "For Mass. residents, housing is where affordability hits hardest."

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2026/05/06/massachusetts-poll-middle-class-housing>

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey, Table B25003, 2019-2023 5-year estimates.*

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey, Table B25070, 2019-2023 5-year estimates.*

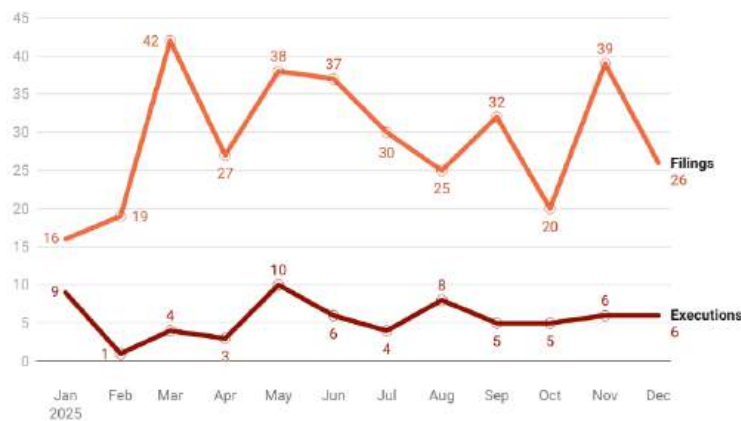
⁶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS), 2017-2021 5-year estimates.*

Eviction Filings and Executions

In 2025, there were **351 eviction filings** and **67 executions for possession**⁷ in Somerville. An execution for possession is the final court document authorizing a landlord to physically remove a tenant from their home. However, an execution does not necessarily result in physical eviction. This is particularly true in non-payment cases where rental assistance can cure the debt and allow the tenant to remain housed even after an execution is issued.

Monthly Eviction Filings and Executions in Somerville, 2025

Eviction filings peaked in March (42) and November (39), while executions remained relatively steady at 3-10 per month. Only 19% of filings resulted in an execution over the full year.



An execution is the final court order authorizing a landlord to physically remove a tenant. 351 total filings and 67 total executions in CY2025. Residential cases only.

Chart: Office of Housing Stability • Source: MassCourts via Massachusetts Trial Court • Created with Datawrapper

The fact that only 19% of filings resulted in an execution suggests that for most households facing eviction, interventions are succeeding in keeping them in their homes. On the other hand, eviction filings themselves often destabilize households and trigger broader financial and housing crises well before a case reaches its conclusion. OHS works to seal eviction records where possible.

Why Tenants Face Eviction

The underlying causes of eviction filings reveal important patterns. Of the 351 filings in 2025, **71% were for non-payment of rent, 17% involved other causes including alleged lease violations, and 12% were “no-fault” evictions.** No-fault evictions are filings where no lease violation is alleged, generally reflecting landlord business decisions such as building sales, renovations, condo conversions, or large unaccepted rent increases.

Amount Owed in Eviction Filings

Most eviction filings involve moderate arrears; over half fall between \$1,000 and \$5,000, with a median of \$3,616. However, arrears represent only part of the picture; many households also need ongoing rental support to maintain stability.



Based on 351 residential eviction filings in CY2025. Amounts range from \$33 to \$42,185. Applies to non-payment cases only.

Chart: Office of Housing Stability • Source: MassCourts via Massachusetts Trial Court • Created with Datawrapper

⁷ Reflects executions in non-payment of rent cases only. See Section 2, "Why Tenants Face Eviction."

The median amount of rental arrears alleged in eviction filings for non-payment cases was **\$3,616**, with most filings concentrated in the \$1,000-\$5,000 range. This distribution reveals a critical window for intervention: many evictions can be prevented with relatively modest financial assistance provided early in a crisis. However, arrears are only part of the picture in non-payment cases. In market-rate housing or units without a deep subsidy, even if arrears are paid and an eviction case is dismissed, tenants may still be unable to afford prospective rent.

The Flex Somerville Affordable Housing Trust Fund (Flex-SAHTF) and Flex Somerville Incentive Voucher Program (Flex SomerVIP) programs are critical components of many housing stabilization plans for Somerville residents, anchoring their tenancies until the household can increase its income, find roommates to share rental costs, or relocate into affordable housing. Funded by the City and by the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and administered by the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) and the Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC), Flex-SAHTF and Flex SomerVIP provide back rent and a period of prospective rental assistance to eligible tenants whose current rent has become unaffordable.

In 2025, Flex-SAHTF and Flex SomerVIP **supported 270 households** with \$1,850,989 in direct rental assistance, the majority of which went to paying rental arrears to prevent displacement.

Legal Representation in Eviction Cases

A critical component of eviction prevention is ensuring tenants have access to legal representation. Analysis of Somerville eviction filings during 2025 reveals a stark power imbalance: 94% of landlords were represented by attorneys in eviction proceedings, and **only 16% of tenants had legal representation citywide**.

While 16% may appear low, Somerville's tenant representation rate far exceeds the statewide average: in 2025, only 4.8% of tenants statewide had legal representation. This difference reflects OHS's sustained investment in legal partnerships. Every client who needs legal representation is referred to a partner organization. Our contracted legal services providers, De Novo and CASLS, screen cases for merit and eligibility, but most referrals result in either full or limited representation.

OHS's policy advocacy work to address this representation gap statewide is discussed in Section 5.

How Somerville Compares to Neighboring Municipalities

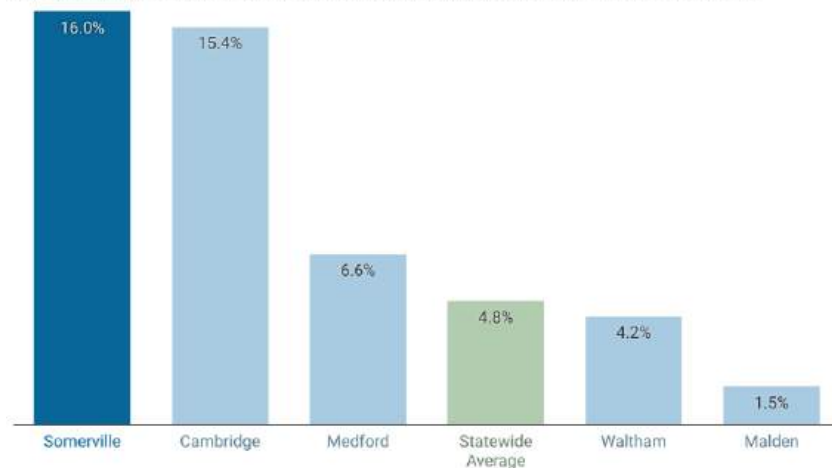
When compared to neighboring cities of similar size, Somerville stands out on two important metrics:

1. Somerville has the **highest tenant representation rate (16%)** among comparable cities.

2. Somerville has **one of the lowest rates of executions issued per poverty population**.

Tenant Legal Representation Rate in Eviction Cases

Somerville tenants are represented by an attorney in 16% of eviction cases, more than triple the statewide average, reflecting OHS's legal referral partnerships with De Novo and CASLS



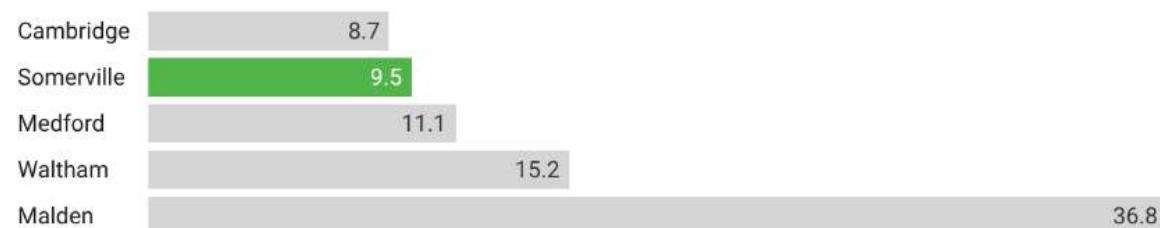
CY2025 eviction data. Landlord representation exceeds 90% in all five cities. The statewide average for tenant representation was 4.8% in 2025.

Chart: Office of Housing Stability • Source: MassCourts via Massachusetts Trial Court • Created with Datawrapper

These metrics reflect the combined impact of enhanced legal representation and the availability of ample flexible rental assistance funds to pay rental arrears, enabling more tenants to avoid eviction and remain housed in Somerville.

Eviction Executions per 1,000 Residents in Poverty

Somerville's execution rate relative to its poverty population is among the lowest of neighboring cities.

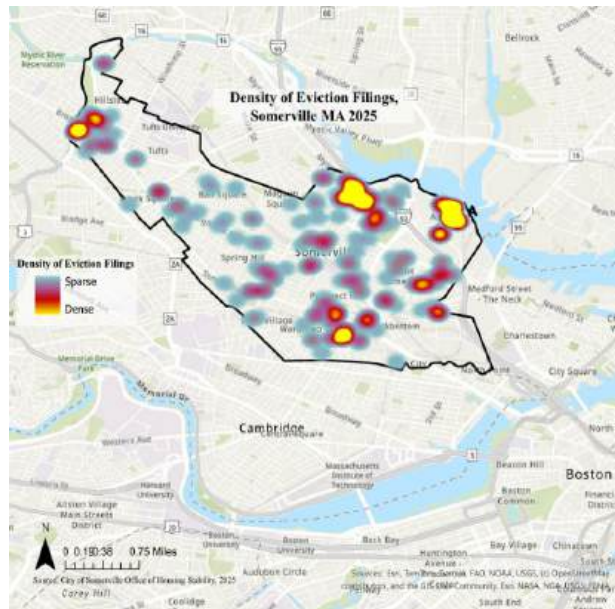


Note: Somerville's poverty rate has declined in recent years (from ~9,661 in 2023 to ~7,680 in 2024), and cities with higher shares of subsidized tenants in eviction filings (e.g., Cambridge at 39% vs. Somerville at 18%) may see lower execution rates due to lower arrears and more assured affordability.

Chart: Office of Housing Stability • Source: MassCourts via Massachusetts Trial Court; U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-year estimates (2023) • Created with Datawrapper

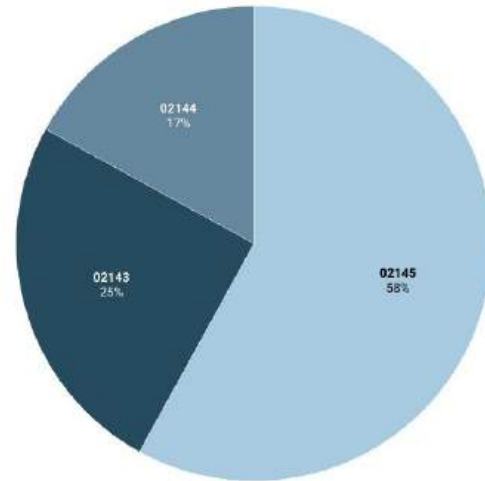
Geographic Concentration

Eviction filings are not evenly distributed across Somerville. **East Somerville (02145) accounted for 58% of all filings citywide and 54% of executions** issued for non-payment cases, meaning more than half of the executions issued in 2025 were against households in this single ZIP code.



Eviction Filings by ZIP Code

East Somerville (02145) accounts for nearly 6 in 10 eviction filings citywide.



Based on 351 residential eviction filings in CV2025
Chart: Office of Housing Stability • Source: MassCourts via Massachusetts Trial Court • Created with Datawrapper

This geographic concentration aligns with patterns in OHS client data explored in Section 3: at 47%, East Somerville residents make up the largest share of the households OHS serves, reflecting the scale of need in the neighborhood.

3. Who Sought Help

The 1,047 Somerville households who sought OHS assistance in 2025 reflect the diversity of the city and the breadth of housing instability across income levels, neighborhoods, and household types. This section describes who these households are and what they were facing when they reached out to OHS.

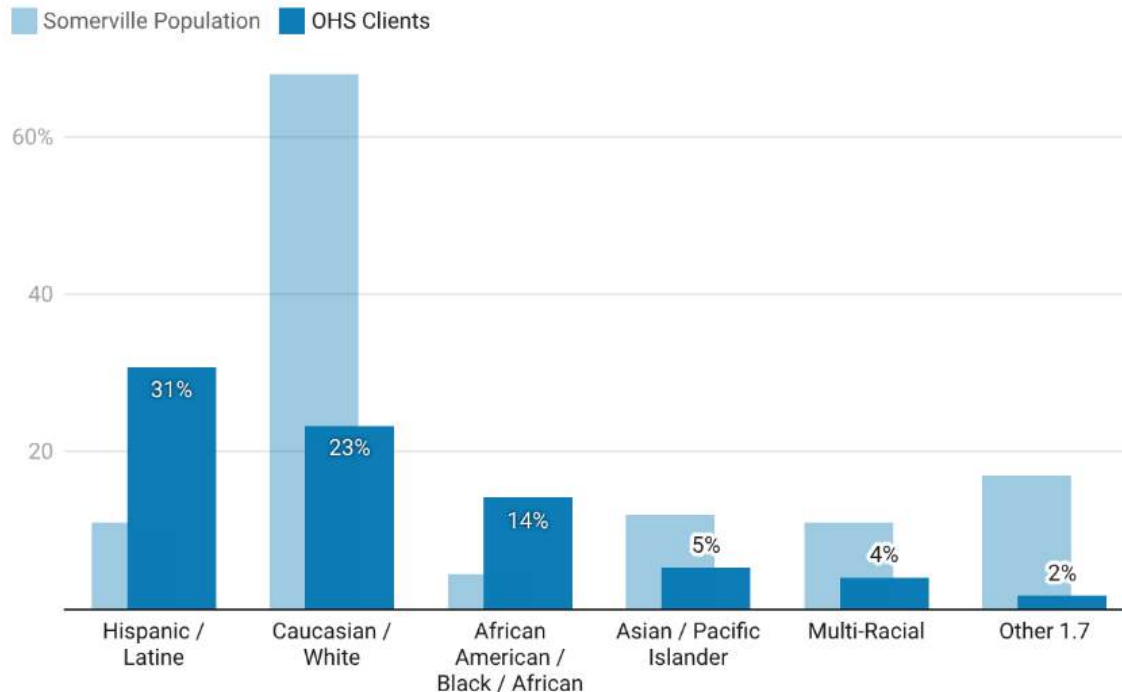
Race and Ethnicity

OHS client data shows significant demographic disparities in who seeks housing stability services. Hispanic/Latine and Black/African American residents are represented among OHS clients at rates well above their share of Somerville's population.

Hispanic/Latine residents make up approximately 11% of Somerville's population but represent 31% of OHS clients, nearly three times their share of the general population.

Race and Ethnicity of Households Served

Hispanic/Latine residents make up 11% of Somerville's population but 31% of OHS clients. Black/African American residents are similarly overrepresented at 14% of clients vs. 4.5% of the population.



"Other" includes Native American/Alaska Native, North African/West Asian, and additional categories. Excludes 3 households with unknown race/ethnicity. Self-reported data; N = 1,047 households.

Source: Somerville Office of Housing Stability; US Census ACS 2019-2023 5-year estimates • Created with Datawrapper

Similarly, **Black/African American residents represent approximately 4.5% of Somerville's population but 14% of OHS clients.** This overrepresentation is consistent with well-documented ^{8,9} structural inequities in housing access, income, and wealth that place communities of color at disproportionate risk of housing instability, though it may also reflect differences in how communities connect with OHS services.

Language

Nearly half (**42%**) of households served by OHS primarily speak a language other than English at home, reflecting Somerville's diverse immigrant communities. **Spanish speakers represent 22%** of all households served, followed by **Portuguese (10%)** and **Haitian Creole (4%)**.

Approximately 30% of households served need interpreter support to access services. Without adequate language access, residents can face barriers to understanding lease

⁸ Hepburn et al., "A Comprehensive Demographic Profile of the US Evicted Population," PNAS, October 2023

⁹ Wedeen, "Black and Hispanic Renters Face Greatest Threat of Eviction in Pandemic," Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, January 2021.

terms, navigating housing applications, communicating with landlords, accessing legal resources, and completing required recertification documents.

Income

The households seeking OHS assistance face severe economic constraints. Among those with known income data (69% of households served), **27% reported monthly income under \$1,000 or no income at all**, and an additional 15% earned between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per month. Thirteen percent earned between \$2,000 and \$3,000 per month. These income levels fall far short of what is needed to afford housing in Somerville, where market-rate rents average \$3,750 per month¹⁰.

Income data was less frequently collected for households receiving only advice and information (31% of records have no income data). Staff report that these cases frequently involve middle- and higher-income tenants facing housing challenges that require guidance rather than financial assistance, demonstrating that housing instability affects Somerville residents across the income spectrum, though the nature of intervention required varies by economic circumstance.

Geography

As noted in Section 2, East Somerville (02145) accounts for the largest share of OHS cases at **47%**, followed by Union Square (02143) at 20% and Teele Square (02144) at 14%. The remaining 19% did not have ZIP code data collected. East Somerville

Households Served by ZIP Code

Nearly half of all OHS cases come from East Somerville (02145), which also accounts for 58% of the city's eviction filings.



N = 1,047 households. 200 households (19%) did not have ZIP code data collected.

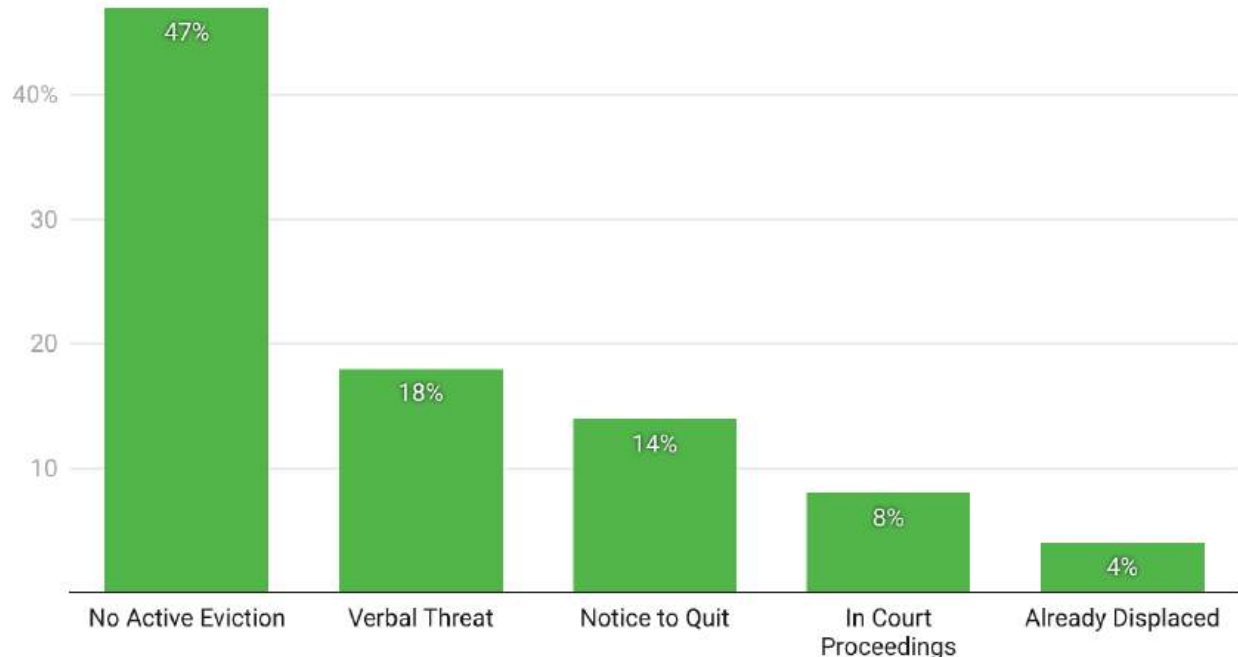
Source: Somerville Office of Housing Stability • Created with Datawrapper

households also present with higher rates of financial assistance needs (56%, compared to 48–50% in other neighborhoods), consistent with the income and eviction patterns documented above and explored further in Section 4.

¹⁰ Zillow, "Somerville, MA Rental Market Trends," May 2026. <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/somerville-ma/>

Eviction Status at Intake

In 2025, 47% of OHS clients arrived before any eviction had begun, 40% were already facing eviction pressure (from a verbal threat through court proceedings), and 4% had already been displaced.



"No active eviction" covers households seeking affordable housing applications, accessibility accommodations, recertification, lease or conditions issues, or other proactive support. The remaining categories reflect the furthest point a household had reached in the eviction process at intake. Excludes 7% of clients with no eviction status recorded; percentages reflect Somerville resident cases in 2025 and may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

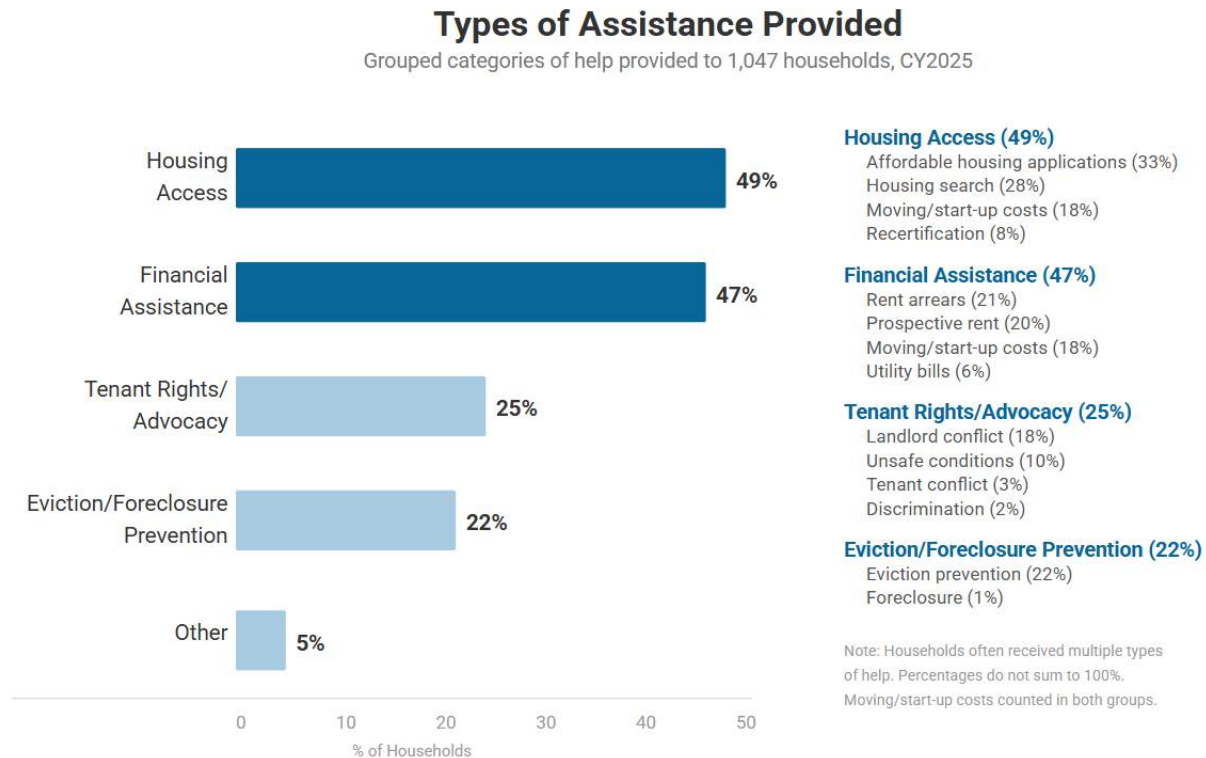
Chart: Office of Housing Stability — 2025 Annual Report • Source: City of Somerville Office of Housing Stability • Created with Datawrapper

This distribution illustrates OHS's dual role in prevention and crisis response. Roughly four in ten households arrive at OHS already navigating eviction pressure - most commonly a verbal threat or written Notice to Quit, with a smaller share at the Summons and Complaint stage or further along in court proceedings. For these households, timely intervention can prevent a court judgment or a physical eviction.

A nearly equal share of the caseload reaches OHS before eviction is on the horizon. These households are working on the longer-term housing access needs that prevent crisis from emerging in the first place: applying for affordable housing or vouchers, navigating accessibility accommodations, planning a voluntary move, or seeking help with recertification or lease terms. Whether someone arrives at OHS amid an active eviction or in advance of one, the underlying work is the same: keeping Somerville residents stably and affordably housed.

4. What Help Was Provided and What Happened

OHS provided a range of services to meet each household's needs. OHS's services fall into five broad categories, shown below. Because households often receive more than one service, the percentages add up to more than 100%; moving/start-up costs are counted in both Housing Access and Financial Assistance.



Staff also work to maximize tenants' incomes, connecting them to benefits programs and employment-related services where appropriate.

How Needs Change Along the Eviction Timeline

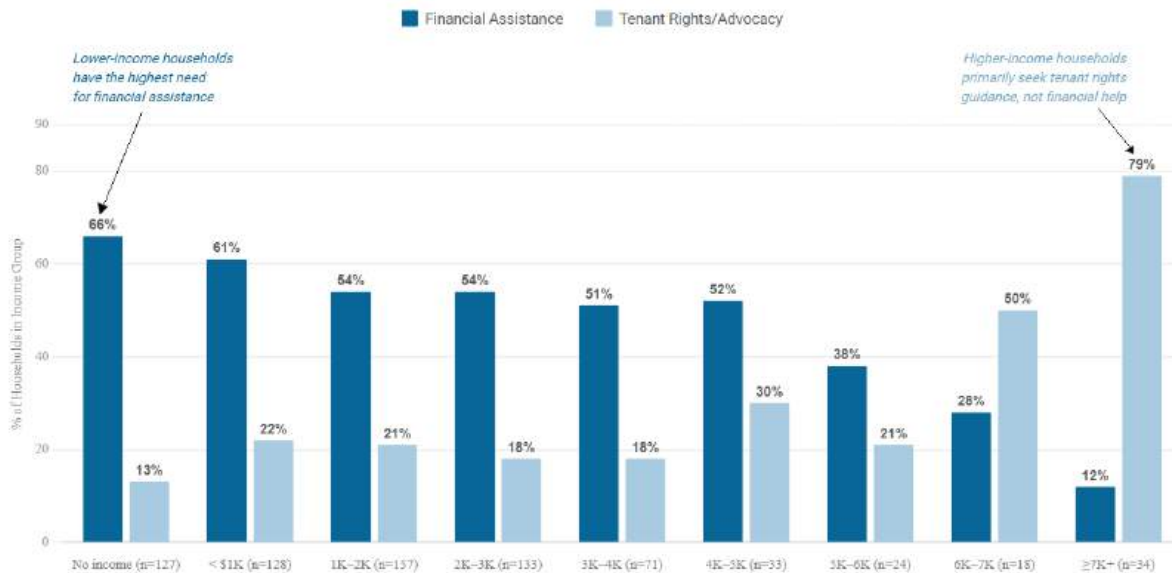
As households move further into the eviction process, from no eviction threat, to verbal threat, to Notice to Quit, to Summons and Complaint, the share of households needing financial assistance roughly doubles, from about 40% to 80%. This pattern is driven primarily by non-payment cases, which make up 71% of filings.

Income shapes the service profile in a parallel way. Households with no income or earning under \$1,000 monthly most often need financial assistance (61-66%), while households earning \$7,000+ monthly come primarily for tenant rights guidance (79%).

Housing instability touches residents across the income spectrum but takes different forms depending on economic circumstances.

How Income Reshapes the Service Profile

Type of help received by household income level (N = 725 households with known income)



Brief Services vs. Full Case Management

Thirty percent of cases (317) received full case management: ongoing, intensive support from a case manager, coordination of multiple services, and active work toward housing stability over an extended period, sometimes lasting several years. The remaining 70% received brief services: advice, information, referrals, or short-term assistance that resolved their housing challenge without requiring case management. Forty two percent of full case management households were families with children.

Outcomes: Full Case Management Cases

Among the 317 full case management cases, 225 were closed during the reporting period and 92 remained open at year's end. Outcome analysis focuses on the 225 closed cases.

Each outcome category represents a different kind of intensive work:

- **Displacement Prevented:** Households remained in their current homes through rental assistance, landlord negotiation, legal support, and sustained case management.

- **Obtained New Housing:** Households secured new, stable housing with OHS assistance, including housing search, applications for subsidized housing, and/or rental start-up costs.
- **Information Provided/Connected to Resources:** Households received substantive assistance, including completion of housing applications, tenant rights education, and connections to ongoing support services, which supported their housing stability.
- **Lost Contact/Withdrew:** Households either became unreachable before outcomes could be documented or withdrew from services.

These outcomes reflect OHS's most intensive work, focused on households facing the most severe crises, where success depends on sustained engagement over months and in some cases years.

Outcomes for Full Case Management Cases

Among 225 closed full case management cases, 35% had displacement prevented and 30% obtained new housing. An additional 26% were provided info or connected to resources. 9% lost contact or withdrew before outcomes could be documented.

Displacement Prevented

35%

Obtained New Housing

30%

Info Provided/Connected to Resources

26%

Lost Contact / Withdrew

9%

'Info Provided/Connected to Resources' includes assistance completing housing applications, referrals to partner organizations, and connections to ongoing support programs

Chart: Somerville Office of Housing Stability • Created with Datawrapper

Note: These outcomes reflect only the 225 closed full case management cases. Households receiving brief services, 70% of the total, resolved their housing challenges without extended engagement; their cases are not counted in the percentages above but represent substantial OHS provision of services.

Two Typical Housing Stability Success Stories

Identifying details have been changed to protect client privacy.

Stabilizing a Family in a Changing Neighborhood

A longtime Somerville resident, an immigrant mother who had raised her children in the same apartment for many years, came to OHS after her landlord moved to end her tenancy. The family had been through a series of difficult years, including a serious family illness that shifted the full weight of household expenses onto her and her adult children. Losing their home would have meant losing the place where they had built their lives and developed critical support systems.

OHS worked with the household to apply for federal public housing and secured priority status on the public housing waitlist. The Somerville Housing Authority offered an apartment, and the family accepted. Somerville Homeless Coalition's Flex program covered the moving truck, picked up donated furniture from a regional furniture bank, and paid the first month's rent at the new unit. The family moved in not long after. For the first time, the youngest child had their own bedroom.

Protecting a Household's Right to Stay

An older Somerville resident who lives with and cares for a sibling with disabilities came to OHS during their annual recertification for an income-restricted apartment. Recertification, the periodic review of income and household composition required to maintain an income-restricted unit, had become overwhelming. Documents were missing, deadlines were looming, and they were at high risk of losing their housing.

OHS staff met with the household on multiple occasions, advocated with the recertification screening organization to limit documentation requirements, identified what necessary documentation was missing, notarized affidavits, and helped pull the full packet together. The household recertified successfully and remains in their apartment.

The older sibling had worked with an OHS case manager years earlier. On this return visit, they told staff they had known they could come back to OHS for help, and that they were very grateful the office was there for them. This case provides an example of the kind of work performed when a case is categorized as "Information Provided/Connected to Resources." Helping residents understand and navigate complicated housing systems is a critical component of OHS's work to keep tenants in their homes.

OHS Programs: Somerville's Local Safety Net

Beyond the core services described in this report (legal referrals, emergency rental assistance, housing search, tenant education and outreach and tenant organizing), OHS designs and operates its own programs to fill gaps that state and federal systems leave open. These programs are locally funded and locally built and generally not subject to state or federal requirements.

- **Municipal Voucher Program (MVP):** A deep rental subsidy for families, seniors, people with disabilities, and residents who face barriers to accessing federal housing programs. Thirty households have achieved housing stability through the program since 2023.

- **Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot:** Provided 198 households with \$750 per month for 12 months (July 2024-June 2025). In the program's final evaluation survey, 80% of participants reported using GBI funds for housing or rent.¹¹
- **Emergency Displacement Program:** Short-term hotel placement for households displaced by fire or other emergencies; 20 households were served in 2025, with an average stay of 22.1 nights.
- **Older Adult Bridge Subsidy:** Somerville's pilot, believed to be the first municipal program of its kind funded by the state, provides rental assistance to help low-income residents age 60 and older remain stably housed until they can access permanent affordable housing. In 2025, the program assisted eight older adult households. Four transitioned to permanent affordable housing, two were able to sustain their existing housing, and two continue to receive bridge assistance while they await placement.

5. Looking Ahead

This report reveals patterns that extend beyond individual crises. Emergency assistance alone cannot resolve the structural affordability challenges Somerville residents face, and closing the gap between incomes and housing costs requires sustained investment in programs and policy.

Data-Driven Program Design: The Municipal Voucher Program

OHS develops programs in direct response to patterns identified through its work, including analysis of the data described in this report. The language access data, showing that 42% of households served speak a language other than English and 30% need interpreter support, along with the disproportionately high rates of housing instability within the immigrant community and communities of color more generally, informed the design of the novel Municipal Voucher Program (MVP).

The MVP provides families, seniors, and persons with disabilities with deep housing subsidies that are intended to be "permanent" until or unless the household is able to access other permanent affordable housing. The MVP is funded through municipal sources only, which means that OHS and its partners are not limited by pre-existing state or federal program requirements. Through the work of an Advisory Board, a decision was made that the MVP would prioritize for assistance immigrant families facing compounding barriers to housing stability, including affordability challenges,

¹¹Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management, University of Massachusetts Boston, Somerville Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot Program, March 2026
<https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/somerville-guaranteed-basic-income-pilot>

linguistic isolation, limited work opportunities, and ineligibility for many federally funded housing programs.

Additionally, given the well-documented harms of housing instability on children, including lost educational attainment, worsened health outcomes, and disrupted social supports¹², and in close collaboration with Somerville's Office of Basic Needs and Housing, MVP further prioritizes households with children in the Somerville school system and unaccompanied minors. To date, 30 vulnerable Somerville households have achieved housing stability through the program.

Federal Policy Threats to Housing Stability

Several federal policy changes, some proposed and some already final, threaten to destabilize housing for Somerville's most vulnerable residents:

- **Elimination of prorated public housing assistance for mixed-status families.** Currently, families with both citizen and non-citizen members can receive partial public housing assistance proportionate to the citizen members of the household. Eliminating this proration would force impacted families to choose between full payment or losing assistance entirely. *Approximately 34 Somerville households would be directly impacted.* OHS submitted comments to HUD opposing this change.
- **Freeze on new housing vouchers.** A pause on issuing new Section 8 and other federal vouchers would constrict the primary tool for moving households off long waitlists. Somerville has already halted the issuance of most new Section 8 vouchers due to federal funding constraints.
- **Public Charge Rules –** The federal government has issued a new rule on when an immigrant household can be denied admission or re-admission to the United States or prevented from adjusting their status based on a finding that they are likely to be a “public charge.” In the past, the fact that households received SNAP, public housing or Medicaid could not be used against them. This regulation, effective September 18, 2026, eliminates the bar on consideration of receipt of these benefits as part of the public charge test and instead gives wide discretion to immigration officers to weigh benefit use in their decisions. Benefits received before September 18, 2026 will still be assessed under the prior, narrower standard.
- **Continuum of Care –** The federal government is attempting to cut funding for homelessness services from permanent supportive housing to programs that provide substance abuse treatment and temporary housing only. This flies in the

¹² Ramphal B, Keen R, Okuzuno SS, Ojogho D, Slopen N. Evictions and Infant and Child Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2023 Apr 3;6(4):e237612. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.7612. PMID: 37040110; PMCID: PMC10091158.

face of all research on the success of current Housing First models of supporting people experiencing homelessness.

Taken together, these proposals would reduce federal resources and increase the burden on local programs to fill widening gaps, a pattern likely to increase demand for OHS services. In addition, these changes may make eligible immigrants afraid to seek badly needed benefits.

Policy Advocacy

Beyond direct services, OHS advances its mission through policy advocacy at the local and state levels, pursuing initiatives that expand funding for affordable housing and anti-displacement work and strengthen tenant rights. Though this report focuses on direct services, the local and state initiatives OHS is currently pursuing are listed below.

State level initiatives:

- **Eviction Record Sealing ([M.G.L. c. 239, Section 16](#)):** OHS was on the statewide steering committee seeking passage of a state bill to allow tenants to seal their eviction records in some circumstances. This bill was signed into law in 2024 and OHS works to ensure that sealable eviction records get sealed.
- **Access to Counsel ([S.968](#)):** OHS was a founding member of the statewide Access to Counsel coalition steering committee. From the fall of 2025 through the winter of 2026, OHS also participated in a nationwide cohort working to implement access to counsel initiatives nationwide. The coalition was successful in securing \$2.5 million in FY26 state funding and succeeded in getting an increase to \$3 million in the FY27 budget. OHS continues to advocate for legislation that would enshrine the program in state law and create an Advisory Council to guide implementation statewide as well as to increase funding.
- **Tenant Right of First Refusal ([H.1544/S.998](#)):** OHS is on the steering committee for this legislation that would give tenants and their agents (such as nonprofits) the first right to purchase a residential building when it is put up for sale. Currently both statewide enabling legislation and a home rule petition for TOPA in Somerville are pending at the state legislature. Versions of the TOPA bill are now included in both House and Senate Amendments to the proposed Economic Development Bill. As of this writing, amendments are being negotiated by a House/Senate conference committee.
- **Rent Stabilization Home Rule Petition ([H.2328/S.1447/S.22](#)):** OHS and the Anti-Displacement Task Force drafted a Home Rule petition seeking state authorization for Somerville to adopt local rent stabilization which was supported by Mayor Wilson and the City Council. As of August 2026, the Home Rule Petition has not advanced out of committee so is unlikely to pass this session. Statewide enabling legislation

did get a favorable recommendation from the Housing Committee but has not advanced since. A statewide rent stabilization ballot question was proposed for the November 2026 election but it was invalidated by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court and cannot be refiled for two years.

- **Real Estate Transfer Fee ([H.3056/S.1937](#)):** OHS and Housing Division staff founded the statewide LOHA (Local Options for Affordability) coalition, advocating for legislation to permit Massachusetts municipalities to adopt a real estate transfer fee to fund affordable housing. Somerville has a Home Rule Petition (H.3930) pending, and sits on the LOHA steering committee. The statewide Senate bill advanced with a favorable recommendation from the Revenue Committee, but the equivalent House bill is still in committee awaiting recommendation which will make passage this session challenging. The Home Rule Petition is similarly stuck in the Revenue Committee.
- **Older Adult Housing Bridge Program ([H.4015/S.475](#)):** OHS sits on the statewide steering committee for this bill championed by the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. This bill would create a statewide program to fund rental assistance for older adults until they can access long term permanent affordable housing. The bills advanced with favorable recommendations to the House Ways and Means and Senate Ways and Means Committees, where they are currently pending. Somerville received \$220,000 for its Older Adult Bridge Pilot Program in FY26. We again received \$200,000 in FY27 but those funds have been put on hold by the legislature until later in the fall of 2026.
- **Small Property Acquisition Fund (SPAF):** Community Land Trusts and Community Development Corporations have advocated for state funding to help them buy small buildings (eight or fewer units) before they reach the speculative market, keeping tenants in place. Following a 2024 Boston pilot, OHS has joined a push for \$3 million in state funding in the FY27 budget. Neither chamber's FY27 budget included it, though the state's Capital Budget remains a possible source of funding for a new program.
- **[Early Leasing Home Rule Petition:](#)** This is a Home Rule Petition drafted by OHS in response to concerns of Somerville residents about unfair leasing practices and approved by the Mayor and City Council. We are required to get approval from the state legislature before we can pass and implement this new law. If the state legislature approves this petition, this ordinance would (1) set fair timeframes for lease renewals and for showing units to prospective tenants, and (2) require 90 days' notice of an owner's intent to renew, including any rent increase.

Local Ordinances:

- **[Housing Stability Notification Act \(Chapter 7 Article XI\):](#)** A first-in-the-state local ordinance passed in 2019 and strengthened in 2022, the HSNA requires residential

owners to inform tenants of their rights and resources at the start and end of a tenancy. OHS keeps these documents current as laws and services change.

- **Strengthened Condominium Conversion Ordinance (Chapter 7 Article IV):** Partly in response to Anti-Displacement Task Force recommendations, the City amended this ordinance twice, doubling the amount of time an owner must wait to convert a vacant unit that had been tenanted to a condominium and updating required relocation payments.
- **Notice of Building Sale Ordinance:** Mayor Wilson and the City Council have approved a local ordinance relating to building sales in Somerville. The ordinance requires owners to notify tenants that their building is being put up for sale at or before the time it's listed, giving tenants earlier warning of potential displacement and giving nonprofits more time to assess whether the building can be purchased and kept off the speculative market. The Ordinance becomes effective on October 14, 2026.

Questions

Questions about this report or any of the initiatives described here can be directed to Bia Moreira at bmoreira@somervillema.gov.