

COVID-19 and Evictions

Your Landlord Should Not Try to Evict You

On March 10, 2020 Governor Baker declared a state of emergency to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Since then Massachusetts courts have reduced operations and are only open for emergency filings. This means most eviction cases are on hold.

But if your landlord has locked you out or turned off your utilities, it is an emergency **call the court right away!**

Find the Housing Court that serves your community:
[mass.gov/orgs/housing-court/locations](https://www.mass.gov/orgs/housing-court/locations)

Housing Court telephone numbers:

Eastern Division:	617-788-8485 (Boston, Somerville, Chelsea)
Northeast Division:	978-689-7833 (Lawrence, Lowell, Woburn) 978-825-4920 (Salem, Lynn)
Southeast Division:	508-677-1505 (Fall River - main number for Southeast) 508-375-6967 (Barnstable) 508-747-8550 (Plymouth) 508-977-4950 (Taunton) 508-994-0156 (New Bedford)
Metro South Division:	508-894-4170 (Brockton, Canton)
Central Division:	508-831-2050 (Worcester, Dudley, Leominster, Marlborough)
Western Division:	413-775-7493 (Greenfield - currently main number) 413-748-7838 (Springfield, Pittsfield, Hadley)

Temporary court closures due to COVID-19
[mass.gov/info-details/temporary-court-closures-due-to-covid-19](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/temporary-court-closures-due-to-covid-19)

What should I do if my landlord tries to force me out or turns off my utilities?

Your landlord must get a court's permission before they evict you and make you move out. If your landlord does not have permission from a court, it is **illegal** for your landlord to:

- Move your belongings out of your apartment,
- Change your locks, a "lockout,"
- Shut off your utilities, a "utility shut-off," or
- Interfere in any way with your use of the unit.

If your landlord does any of these things, you have rights and you can take steps to stop them.

A court can impose penalties for these illegal actions, including making your landlord pay you at least 3 months' rent, plus any court costs and attorney's fees.

Note: The Lockout Could Be Legal

Lockouts are sometimes legal. If your co-tenant or roommate told your landlord they need to be protected from you, or if someone in your home has a 209A restraining order that order you to stay away, it may be legal to lock you out.

What If My Landlord Locks Me Out or Shuts Off My Utilities

You may need to take one or more of the following steps. You do not need to do them in this order.

Contact Your Landlord

Tell them, "What you are doing is illegal. I will have to call the police or call the court if you do not let me back in or turn my utilities back on right away."

Call the Police

If you cannot resolve the problem directly with your landlord, call the police and report what your landlord did.

- A few words from a police officer may be enough to convince your landlord to stop the illegal activity.
- Many police will tell your landlord that locking you out without a court order is against the law and your landlord has to let you back in.
- If a police officer tells you they cannot get involved because your dispute is "civil," not "criminal," show them this handout and ask them to call a supervisor to confirm the law.

Call the Court

If your landlord refuses to let you back in, or turn your utilities back on, **call the court right away!** Tell the clerk you are "facing an emergency." Explain what your landlord has done. Ask the clerk for an order that tells your landlord to stop the illegal activity. The court can order your landlord to allow you back into your apartment and turn your utilities back on.

For Help

Contact Legal Aid or a Tenant Organization in your area.

[MassLegalHelp.org/Find-Legal-Aid](https://www.masslegalhelp.org/Find-Legal-Aid)

Eastern Region Legal Intake Helpline

617-603-1700

Essex County Bar Association Lawyer for a Day Program

978-500-5790

Greater Boston Legal Services

617-603-1807

MetroWest Legal Services

508-620-1830

South Coastal Counties Legal Services

1-800-244-9023

Northeast Legal Aid

978-458-1465, 1-800-336-2262

Community Legal Aid

855-252-5342