

OFFERED BY COUNCILORS HENRY SANTANA, BREADON, COLETTA ZAPATA, DURKAN,
LOUIJEUNE, MEJIA, PEPÉN, WEBER, AND WORRELL



CITY OF BOSTON

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY FIVE

ORDER FOR A HEARING TO FACILITATE THE CREATION OF
SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY UNITS (SROs)
IN THE CITY OF BOSTON

WHEREAS, Single Room Occupancy units (SROs) provide permanent and affordable housing for thousands of Bostonians and have the untapped potential to house many more; *and*

WHEREAS, Through short-term and flexible leases, SROs allow for single-room rentals with access to shared facilities, such as bathrooms, living rooms, and kitchens; *and*

WHEREAS, SROs are uniquely able to meet communities' needs in both affordability and support, as well as being amongst the core offerings of initiatives serving target populations by providing housing and specialized services; *and*

WHEREAS, SROs have historically been a part of Boston's fabric — from housing Bostonians since at least the 19th century, to over 10% of the City's population residing in SROs in the 1885 and 1895 censuses, and to over 3,000 licensed SRO buildings providing over 35,000 units in the 1920s; *and*

WHEREAS, The available stock of SROs has decreased significantly over time due to suburbanization, urban renewal policies causing SROs to be torn down in the thousands, and gentrification leading to mass conversions of SROs to luxury townhouses; *and*

WHEREAS, Zoning laws have contributed to the decline of SROs by imposing minimum parking requirements, setting density caps, and requiring specialized rooming house licences from the Boston Licensing Board, which has discretion to deny applications that may impact property value; *and*

WHEREAS, Such restrictions curtail Boston's ability to address the current housing unaffordability crisis, which impacts hundreds of thousands of residents: 46% of Boston's households are cost burdened (spending greater than 30% of their income on rent or mortgage) and 23% being severely cost burdened (spending greater than 50% of their income on rent or mortgage); *and*

WHEREAS, Cost-burdened households are at increased risk of entering homelessness, which impacts over 2,000 single adult individuals in Boston; *and*

WHEREAS, Because the cost of an SRO is approximately 75% that of a studio apartment, it would provide many current cost-burdened single-renters — of which there are an estimated 33,000 in Boston — a living arrangement option that may better suit such renters' current situation; *and*

WHEREAS, SROs provide a flexible housing arrangement for transient populations, including new immigrants and individuals without stable employment, who may be less inclined to commit to, or less able to afford, traditional, longer-term leases; *and*

WHEREAS, SROs are essential for members of some of our most vulnerable communities, including formerly unhoused people, formerly incarcerated people, survivors of domestic or intimate partner violence, and those experiencing or recovering from a substance use disorder; *and*

WHEREAS, Existing initiatives in Boston, including Caritas Communities, Justice 4 Housing, Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation, and Haley House, have successfully used SROs to uplift these target communities by offering support, services, and community alongside free or affordable housing; instituting policies more amenable to SROs would uplift such existing organizations, encourage their growth, and allow for emergence of new organizations; *and*

WHEREAS, Ensuring City policy meaningfully allows for the creation of SROs would provide greater choice to our neighbors who are cost-burdened, as well as generate more pathways of support for members of target populations seeking specialized services made possible through SRO housing. ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing to explore implementing policies that would be more amenable to the creation of additional Single Room Occupancy Units (SROs) in the City of Boston. Representatives from the Planning Department and Mayor's Office of Housing, as well as community organizations with expertise on SROs and some of the populations they are particularly adept at serving will be invited, and members of the public are encouraged to attend and testify.

Filed in Council: October 22, 2025