

# Rent control, long shunned, is back on the table in Massachusetts



JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Homes in South Boston.

By [Tim Logan](#)

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A battle is brewing on Beacon Hill over a longstanding hot-button issue in housing: rent control.

A group of House lawmakers are getting ready to file a bill that would allow cities and towns in Massachusetts to impose rent control — which voters in 1994 banned statewide — and a variety of other measures to protect renters from eviction and steep hikes in their monthly payments.

It's the latest, and potentially widest-reaching, in an array of city and state bills designed to address Greater Boston's housing crisis, including by capping what landlords can charge tenants. Even though it's bound to be controversial, supporters say, the idea worth a close look.

"It's all in response to our ongoing housing emergency," said state Representative Michael Connolly, a Cambridge Democrat who is one of the bill's lead sponsors. "The burden of renting in so many of our communities has become so extreme. People are asking what can we do about it."

The measure would allow municipalities to set their own rules to protect tenants from eviction — including by limiting how much rent they have to pay — without having to win approval on Beacon Hill, as they do now. It would effectively overturn the 1994 ballot initiative that outlawed rent control.

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After being out of favor for decades, the concept of rent control has been gaining steam across the country in recent years as more municipalities grapple with housing costs that have risen far faster than inflation. [Oregon last month became the first state to impose rent control](#), capping rent increases at 7 percent a year, plus inflation. Lawmakers in Illinois and New York are floating similar proposals, and California legislators are taking up a bill that [could expand existing rent control there, despite the measure being defeated at the ballot box last fall](#).

In Massachusetts, a quarter-century after residents voted to end rent control, it's time to have that