

“The Case Against Rent Control: Facts Over Fiction”

Proponents of rent control argue that it is a "moderate" and time-tested policy simply because it has existed in various forms since the 1920s. But the mere existence of a policy in history does not make it just or effective. Harmful policies like racial segregation, bans on interracial marriage, and redlining were also widely accepted at one time, but history and experience have since revealed their deep societal damage. Rent control is a failed experiment that history has shown to be more harmful than helpful.

Supporters also claim that New York City's addition of over a million housing units proves rent control can coexist with growth. But that figure is deeply misleading. The vast majority of new construction in NYC is exempt from rent regulation either by law or through tax incentive programs like 421a meaning the city grew despite rent control, not because of it. In fact, the number of rent-regulated units has declined over time due to disinvestment, deregulation, and landlords exiting the market. Had rent control not been in place, housing growth likely would have been even more robust.

To address the housing crisis, Massachusetts needs to expand supply significantly across all income levels. At the same time, the state should offer direct aid such as vouchers or rental assistance to those most in need. This dual strategy increases affordability without distorting the housing market or discouraging private investment.

Proponents of rent control dismiss the strong consensus among economists, housing experts, and eight decades of statistics pointing to how price controls reduce supply, discourage maintenance, and ultimately harm tenants. These same voices would never deny the science behind climate change. Yet when it comes to housing, they abandon scientific consensus in favor of a failed ideology. Massachusetts cannot afford this double standard. We need solutions grounded in evidence, not politics.

The Facts

1. Rent control has failed everywhere it has been implemented, with real-world consequences.

- a. In Cambridge, MA, rent control was repealed in 1994.
A [study](#) by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that lifting rent control [increased property values by 12%](#), improved housing conditions, and unlocked reinvestment in previously neglected buildings.
- b. In San Francisco, a [Stanford study](#) found that rent control reduced the rental housing supply by 15% and increased rents citywide as landlords converted units to condos or Airbnb.
- c. In Los Angeles, research organization RAND [reports](#) rent control led to landlords disinvesting in rent-controlled buildings, contributing to deterioration, overcrowding, and rising rents in unregulated units.
- d. In this [report](#), The Foundation for Economic Education refers to rent control as a “Well intentioned disaster”. Long known for strict rent regulation, Sweden has faced a housing crisis and black-market sublets due to artificial rent suppression and supply constraints.
- e. In every [case](#), rent control distorts the market, reduces supply, and ends up hurting the very tenants it aims to protect.

2. Just because a policy existed historically doesn't make it effective or just.

- a. Rent control dates back to 1920, but so did other now-discredited policies like racial segregation, anti-interracial marriage laws, and [redlining](#).
- b. 20% of rent controlled dwellings benefited [wealthy families](#), not the target population it was intended to. Less than 10% of rent control tenants were low income.
- c. The existence of rent control over time doesn't prove it was beneficial, like those other policies, [its harm](#) became clearer with time and experience.

3. Rent control was repealed in many jurisdictions for good reason.

- a. Massachusetts voters [repealed rent control](#) in 1994 through a statewide ballot measure.
- b. Since then, areas like Cambridge saw reinvestment in housing stock, increased property values, and greater housing mobility.

4. Connolly misrepresents New York City's housing data.

- a. While it's true NYC added over 1 million housing units, the vast majority of that growth came from new construction that is exempt from rent control.
- b. In fact, [rent-stabilized and rent-controlled](#) units have declined over time due to disinvestment, deregulation, and owners leaving the market.
- c. NYC's ability to grow its housing stock occurred [despite rent control](#), not because of it a reflection of zoning reforms, density, and strong market demand, not regulation.

5. Economists overwhelmingly agree rent control restricts supply.

- a. Studies from [St Louis Fed](#), [Stanford](#), [Harvard](#), and [Brookings Institution](#) conclude that rent control leads to:
 - i. Reduction in available rental units
 - ii. Conversion of rentals to condos
 - iii. Disincentives to maintain or improve property
 - iv. Worse outcomes for tenants in the long run
- b. Even progressive economists like [Paul Krugman](#) have written that rent control “discourages construction and drives up rents overall.”

6. True affordability comes from increasing supply and targeted aid.

- a. The solution is to build more housing across all income levels, paired with rental assistance or vouchers for those in greatest need.
- b. Supply-side policies help both current renters and future generations by reducing overall pressure on the housing market.