

## ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS ACCOUNTED FOR AT LEAST 10 PERCENT OF NEW HOMES PERMITTED IN MASSACHUSETTS IN 2025

In February 2026, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) [completed](#) its second semi-annual accessory dwelling unit (ADU) survey of municipalities. The results show that ADUs continue to be approved in substantial numbers at a time when the broader housing production pipeline [has dried up](#). The survey also offers hints at how further policy reforms may help Massachusetts continue expanding the rights of homeowners to build ADUs.

Legalized statewide after the [Affordable Homes Act of 2024](#), ADUs are small homes located on the same property as larger, primary dwellings, often in backyard cottages, attached additions, or attic or basement apartments. Before the AHA regulations were fully implemented [in February 2025](#), ADU production in Massachusetts was sporadic and highly dependent on the local regulatory landscape. One 2018 survey of several dozen Massachusetts communities found only one or two examples of a municipality permitting [more than 10 ADUs](#) in the most recent year for which data was available. In 2025, [32 communities](#) approved at least 10 ADUs, including highly desirable suburbs like Milton and Newton.

In total, 1,224 ADUs were permitted statewide in 2025, likely an undercount since 58 communities [didn't respond](#) to either of the state's ADU surveys. But based on preliminary estimates of annual permitting [from the](#)

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**Employers tell us the lack of modestly priced homes in Greater Boston's suburbs makes recruiting and retaining talent a grind. Brokers say affordability limits their ability to lure new companies here. The result? We're losing workers and businesses to North Carolina, Texas, Florida, and New Hampshire.”**

Charles River Regional Chamber President and CEO [Greg Reibman](#).

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

As of December 18, 2025, just 29.9 percent of homes in the permitting pipeline under the MBTA Communities Act are located within half a mile of a subway or commuter rail station.

[Source: [Boston Indicators](#)]

### FACT OF THE MONTH

[U.S. Census Bureau](#), those 1,224 ADUs still account for 10.1 percent of the total new homes authorized in Massachusetts in 2025.

It's also possible that many ADU applications filed in 2025 haven't been approved yet, or that municipalities will be able to process and approve more applications as they develop institutional expertise. The 1,224 ADU permits came from a total of [1,639 submitted applications](#) in 2025, an approval rate of 74.7 percent. By contrast, California, often considered [the poster child](#) for building ADUs at scale, had an ADU application approval rate [of 89.5 percent](#) between 2018 and 2024.

Boston permitted [the most ADUs](#) of any Massachusetts municipality in 2025 (44), despite being [the only community in the state](#) not subject to the EOHLC's new ADU rules. An [ongoing reform effort](#) in Boston aims to streamline the process for building ADUs and similar incremental remodels. In such a compact city, it may be especially impactful if these reforms broadly allow attached additions and internal conversion ADUs as a matter of right.

Nantucket, where ADUs might be a good fit for housing seasonal residents and year-round service workers alike, produced [the fourth-most ADUs](#) in the state after the much-larger communities of Boston, Plymouth, and Lawrence. Another vacation destination—Barnstable—received even more ADU applications than Nantucket, but has only approved six of them so far. Meanwhile, on a per capita basis, three out of the top five towns by ADU permits issued in 2025 [are on Martha's Vineyard](#).

As more data on ADU production in Massachusetts comes in, it will become clearer where there may still be pain points in the permitting process and regulatory barriers that could be addressed with further reform. One factor to watch: how difficult it is to build ADUs in communities with only private septic systems, as opposed to centralized sewer lines.

# MASSACHUSETTS WILL STUDY REDUCING BUILDING CODE EGRESS REQUIREMENTS TO ONE STAIRCASE IN SOME APARTMENT BUILDINGS

In February 2026, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey issued [an executive order](#) establishing a technical advisory group to study the safety implications of reducing means of egress requirements in mid-rise multifamily residential buildings. Currently, the Massachusetts State Building Code requires most buildings with at least four stories to have [two staircases](#).

The Massachusetts study makes it one of [more than a dozen states](#) since 2023 to re-examine or consider re-examining the two-stair requirement, which originates from [the International Building Code](#). Several states—including Colorado, Montana, New Hampshire, and Texas—have [begun implementing](#) new standards that only require one staircase in some contexts. Connecticut was poised to join that list of implementers, but [recently backtracked](#) due to opposition from fire safety officials (see Table 1).

**Table 1: States with Single-Stair Mid-Rise Multifamily Reform Actions as of March 2026**

State	Reform Outcome/Policy
California	Studied, but not recommended
Colorado	Allowed up to five stories in jurisdictions with at least 100,000 residents
Connecticut	Allowed statewide in 2024. Later repealed after opposition from fire officials
Hawaii	Resolution passed requesting code council to allow single stair statewide
Maryland	Study authorized
Massachusetts	Study authorized
Minnesota	Study underway
Montana	Allowed statewide up to six stories
New Hampshire	Allowed statewide up to four stories
New York	Study underway
Oregon	Localities can opt into allowing single-stair buildings up to four stories
Tennessee	Localities can opt into allowing single-stair buildings up to six stories
Texas	Allowed statewide up to six stories, but localities can opt out
Virginia	Studied, but not yet implemented
Washington	Localities can opt into allowing up to six stories. Not yet implemented

Sources: [Pew Charitable Trusts](#), [CalMatters](#), [CT Mirror](#), [Boston Indicators](#), [Medium](#), [Washington State Building Code Council](#)

Opponents of single stair building code reform [argue](#) that it would make it more difficult for occupants to escape

in the event of a fire or other emergency. Among these opponents is the International Fire Chiefs Association.

But proponents counter that advances in fire safety technology have rendered requirements for multiple means of egress unnecessary. Fire sprinklers, smoke alarms, structural improvements, and “compartmentation” standards limiting the spread of fire from one unit to another have led to rapid reductions in fire death rates in newer buildings. A 2025 Pew Charitable Trusts study found that, nationally, occupants of multifamily housing built since 2010 had [one-tenth the fire death rate](#) of occupants of multifamily housing built in the 1990s.

Proponents also argue that eliminating the requirement for a second staircase could lower the cost of building new housing substantially while facilitating more development on dimensionally constrained lots. A 2024 study by the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard found that, solely in areas with access to MBTA subway lines, legalizing single-stair mid-rise buildings could create the potential for [at least 130,000 new homes](#).

A separate 2025 Pew Charitable Trusts study [estimated](#) that eliminating the second staircase and related access corridors in a typical small midrise multifamily building would result in construction cost savings of 6–13 percent. The same study found that, in New York City from 2012–2024, there was [no significant difference](#) in the fire death rate of modern single-stair buildings and that of other types of residences.

If the Massachusetts technical advisory group ends up recommending the adoption of single-stair reform in the Bay State, it will likely only apply to relatively small mid-rise buildings, in line with [reforms in other states](#). Still, with design and cost challenges in construction limiting the potential for residential development in a housing-starved region, single-stair reform could measurably lower the cost basis for many new infill projects.

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