Massachusetts Eviction Process: Notices, Court Steps and Timeline

Summary for landlords and property managers. Last reviewed October 29, 2026. Full guide: https://www.generationadvisory.com/laws/massachusetts-eviction-process

Massachusetts evictions are summary process cases heard in the Housing Court or a District Court. A nonpayment case starts with a 14 day notice to quit, and a tenant at will who has not had a similar notice in the past year can stop the termination by paying in full within 10 days.

Key points

- For unpaid rent, the landlord serves a 14 day written notice to quit; a tenant at will who has not had a similar notice in the past 12 months can stop the termination by paying everything owed within 10 days of receiving it. The notice must state the 10 day right to pay; if it does not, the tenant can pay up to the answer date.
- A tenancy at will can be ended without a reason by written notice equal to the interval between rent payments or 30 days, whichever is longer.
- Summary process cases can be filed in the Housing Court, which covers the whole state, or in the District Court where the property is located.
- No statute sets a cure period for other lease violations; a lease tenant is served the notice the lease calls for, and a tenant at will can be given a no fault termination notice instead.
- The summons lists an entry date, and the tenant's written answer and any counterclaims are generally due shortly after that date under the summary process rules.

Massachusetts at a glance

Rule	Massachusetts	Law
Notice for unpaid rent	For unpaid rent, the landlord serves a 14 day written notice to quit; a tenant at will who has not had a similar notice in the past 12 months can stop the termination by paying everything owed within 10 days of receiving it. The notice must state the 10 day right to pay; if it does not, the tenant can pay up to the answer date.	G.L. c.186, sections 11 and 12
Notice for a lease violation	No statute sets a cure period for other lease violations; a lease tenant is served the notice the lease calls for, and a tenant at will can be given a no fault termination notice instead.	G.L. c.186 and lease terms

Rule	Massachusetts	Law
Ending a tenancy without cause	A tenancy at will can be ended without a reason by written notice equal to the interval between rent payments or 30 days, whichever is longer.	G.L. c.186, section 12
Where the case is filed	Summary process cases can be filed in the Housing Court, which covers the whole state, or in the District Court where the property is located.	G.L. c.239 and G.L. c.185C
Tenant response time	The summons lists an entry date, and the tenant's written answer and any counterclaims are generally due shortly after that date under the summary process rules.	Uniform Summary Process Rules
Removal after judgment	Generally, after judgment, the execution issues once the appeal period passes, and a sheriff or constable gives written notice before moving the tenant out.	G.L. c.239
Typical overall timeline	A contested case often takes about six to ten weeks from notice to removal, and longer when the tenant raises defenses.	Court practice (estimate)

Timeline

Step	Typical time	Rule
Notice period for unpaid rent	14 days	G.L. c.186, sections 11 and 12
Notice period for a lease violation	Varies	G.L. c.186 and lease terms
Tenant response after the case is served	Set by the court	Uniform Summary Process Rules
From judgment to removal	Short waiting period	G.L. c.239
Whole case, uncontested	A few weeks	Court practice (estimate)

Mistakes to avoid

- Demanding more than the rent actually owed in a notice for unpaid rent, for example by adding late fees or utilities.
- Counting the notice period wrong and filing a day too early.

- Taking partial rent after serving a notice without knowing how it affects the case.
- Keeping no proof of service. Write down who delivered the notice, how and when, and keep a copy.
- Trying to speed things up with a lockout, a utility shutoff or by moving belongings out.

Verify current law

Laws named in this summary:

- G.L. c.186, sections 11 and 12
- G.L. c.186 and lease terms
- G.L. c.186, section 12
- G.L. c.239 and G.L. c.185C
- Uniform Summary Process Rules
- G.L. c.239
- Trial Court fee schedule
- G.L. c.186, section 14 and G.L. c.184, section 18
- G.L. c.186, section 15B, as amended by the fiscal 2026 state budget (2025)

Official sources:

- General Laws of Massachusetts (Massachusetts Legislature): https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws
- Mass.gov: The Attorney General's Guide to Landlord and Tenant Rights: https://www.mass.gov/guides/the-attorney-generals-guide-to-landlord-and-tenant-rights
- Mass.gov: Frequently asked questions about residential rental broker's fees: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/frequently-asked-questions-about-residential-rental-brokers-fees
- Massachusetts Trial Court: Housing Court: https://www.mass.gov/orgs/housing-court

> General information, not legal advice. Check current law and talk to a Massachusetts attorney before you act. Last reviewed October 29, 2026.