



# BILL OF RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

HOUSE BILL 695  
AND SENATE BILL 46

**Lead Sponsor:**

Representative William Smitty Pignatelli  
and Senator Linda Dorcena Forry

The Bill of Rights would entitle people  
experiencing homelessness to the same rights  
as any other resident of Massachusetts



**Please Speak Up for the Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness  
This Tuesday, November 21st at the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and  
Persons with Disabilities Bill Hearing!**

**Lead Sponsors: Representative William Smitty Pignatelli and Senator Linda Dorcena Forry**

**House Cosponsors:** Representatives Brian Ashe, Cory Atkins, Ruth Balser, Christine Barber, Antonio Cabral, Thomas Calter, James Cantwell, Gerard Cassidy, Mike Connolly, Michael Day, Marjorie Decker, Daniel Donahue, Michelle DuBois, Carolyn Dykema, Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Michael Finn, Sean Garballey, Carmine Gentile, Susan Gifford, Solomon Goldstein-Rose, Kenneth Gordon, Stephan Hay, Jonathan Hecht, Kay Khan, Jack Lewis, David Linsky, Jay Livingstone, Adrian Madaro, Elizabeth Malia, Paul McMurtry, Mathew Muratore, James O'Day, Alice Peisch, Denise Provost, Angelo Puppulo, David Rogers, Byron Rushing, Frank Smizik, Thomas Stanley, Jose Tosado, Paul Tucker, Steven Ultrino, Aaron Vega, and Chris Walsh.

**Senate Cosponsors:** Senators Michael Brady, William Brownsberger, Sonia Chang-Diaz, Sal DiDomenico, Eileen Donoghue, James Eldridge, Jason Lewis, Joan Lovely, Thomas McGee, Mark Montigny, and Michael Moore.

**Summary:** An Act providing a homeless bill of rights (House Bill 695) and An Act creating a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness (Senate Bill 46) would establish a definition of homelessness and protect key rights of all residents, whether or not they are experiencing homelessness. The bills are modeled after landmark legislation passed in 2012 in Rhode Island. Similar legislation has passed since then in Connecticut, Illinois, and Puerto Rico. The legislation is considered no-cost and non-controversial, yet would promote human rights and increase human dignity.

**Bill Status:** The bills were filed in January 2017. H.695 was sent to the Joint Committee on Housing, and was heard on June 20, 2017. It was reported out favorably, and is awaiting action by the House Committee on Ways and Means. **S.46 has been sent to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, and will be heard on November 21, 2017.** The bills are nearly identical to House Bill 1129 from the 2015-2016 session. That bill was reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Housing in December 2015 and sent to the House Committee on Ways and Means. In spite of considerable support, the bill did not pass last session. We are hopeful that the momentum from last session and the pressing need to uphold human rights and dignity will propel the bills forward this session.

### **Why is it necessary to create a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness?**

People experiencing homelessness often are subjected to discrimination and mistreatment based on their housing status. The bill of rights is a guide for state and local officials emphasizing that people experiencing homelessness are entitled to the same rights as any other resident of Massachusetts. The bill of rights seeks to outline those rights so as to prevent discrimination based on housing status. The legislation recognizes the

increased prevalence of homelessness in Massachusetts due to widespread economic hardship, the insufficient availability of safe, affordable housing, and a weakened social safety net.

**“No person’s rights, privileges, or access to public services may be denied or abridged solely because he or she is experiencing homelessness.”** The rights specifically included in the bill of rights are the right to move freely in public spaces, the right to equal treatment by municipal agencies (such as police departments), freedom from discrimination in employment, the right to emergency medical care, the right to register to vote and to vote, freedom from disclosure of records, and the right to a reasonable expectation of privacy of property.

**The bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness seeks to have the rights outlined be treated as a statement of legislative intent, as a guide for state and municipal agencies.**

### **Organizational Endorsers:**

Allston Brighton Health Collaborative  
American Friends Service Committee Material Aid & Advocacy Program  
Arise for Social Justice  
Boston Homeless Solidarity Committee  
Boston Women's Fund  
Bridge Over Troubled Waters  
Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance  
Children's League of Massachusetts  
City Life Vida Urbana  
City Mission Boston  
Community Works  
Emmanuel Church in the City of Boston  
Family Promise MetroWest  
First Church Shelter  
Horizons for Homeless Children  
Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants  
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless  
My Brother's Table  
New Bedford Homeless Advocates Inc.  
Poor People's United Fund  
Roca  
Samaritans Steps, Inc.π  
ServiceNet, Inc.  
Somerville Homeless Coalition  
South Congregational Church  
Spare Change News/Homeless Empowerment Project (HEP)  
Tapestry Health  
Women's Lunch Place  
Y2Y Harvard Square

*(List as of November 20, 2017)*

**Protect the Rights of All Residents of Massachusetts: Actively Support An Act Providing a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness, House Bill 695/Senate Bill 46!**

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley, Associate Director, at [kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org) or 781-595-7570 x17.

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