



BILL OF RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESS

HOUSE DOCKET 1113 AND SENATE DOCKET 1548

Lead Sponsor:

Representative William Smitty Pignatelli
and Senator Linda Dorcea Forry

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



Summary

An Act providing a homeless bill of rights (House Docket 1113) and An Act creating a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness (Senate Docket 1548) would establish a definition of homelessness and protect key rights of all residents, whether or not they are experiencing homelessness. The bill is modeled after landmark legislation passed in 2012 in Rhode Island. Similar legislation has since passed in Connecticut and Illinois.

Bill Status

The bills were filed in January 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 bill 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 seeks to have the rights outlined be treated as a statement of legislative intent, as a guide for state and municipal agencies.

Protect the Rights of All Residents of Massachusetts: Support An Act Providing a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness, House Docket 1113/Senate Docket 1548!

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy, at kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17.

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