



Lead Sponsors: Representative William Smitty Pignatelli and Senator Rebecca Rausch

House Cosponsors: Representatives Mike Connolly, Marjorie Decker, Dylan Fernandes, Michael Finn, Sean Garballey, Carmine Gentile, Susan Gifford, Carlos Gonzalez, Tami Gouveia, Jonathan Hecht, Natalie Higgins, Russell Holmes, Mary Keefe, Jack Lewis, Jay Livingstone, Adrian Madaro, Paul McMurtry, James O'Day, Denise Provost, Jon Santiago, Thomas Stanley, Chynah Tyler, and Steven Ultrino

Senate Cosponsors: Senators William Brownsberger, Harriette Chandler, Sal DiDomenico, James Eldridge, Patricia Jehlen, Jason Lewis, Mark Montigny, and Rebecca Rausch

Summary: An Act providing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness (House Bill 1314 and Senate Bill 816) 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 in Connecticut, Illinois, and Puerto Rico.

Bill Status: The bills were refiled in January 2019, and have been assigned to the committee on Housing. 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 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 they are 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 (as of June 2019):

AIDS Action/Fenway Health
AIDS Project Worcester
Boston Center for Independent Living
Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc.
Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries
DIAL/SELF Youth & Community Services
The Haven Project
Homeless Empowerment Project/Spare Change News
HomeStart, Inc.
Martin Richard Institute for Social Justice
Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance
National Association of Social Workers Massachusetts Chapter
Northeast Justice Center
Rosie's Place
Wayside Youth & Family Support
Western MA Network to End Homelessness
Y2Y Network

Protect the Rights of All Residents of Massachusetts: Please endorse and actively support An Act Providing a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness, House Bill 1314/Senate Bill 816!

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley, Associate Director, at kelly@mahomeless.org, 781-595-7570 x17 or Molly Schulman, Community Organizer/Legislative Advocate, at molly@mahomeless.org, 781-595-7570 x20.

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