



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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Promoting Dignity for People Without Homes: Representative Smitty Pignatelli Is Joined by More Than 60 Legislative Colleagues in Calling for Passage of a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness (House Bill 1129)

BOSTON— With less than two weeks to go before the Massachusetts Legislature ends its current two-year session, State Representative William Smitty Pignatelli (D-Lenox) is leading an effort to pass House Bill 1129, An Act to Establish a Homeless Bill of Rights. Yesterday, he delivered a letter co-signed by more than 60 of his State House colleagues to the Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means, Representative Brian Dempsey. A favorable report from House Ways and Means is needed so that the bill can move forward toward passage.

Representative Pignatelli is the lead sponsor of House Bill 1129, which seeks to create guiding principles for how municipal and state agencies and other entities treat people who are experiencing homelessness, and to decrease discrimination based on homelessness status. The bill outlines certain rights that should be enjoyed by all residents of the Commonwealth, regardless of housing situation and homelessness status, such as the right to move freely in public spaces, the right to privacy of personal records, the right to private property, and the right to receive medical care. He has been working with the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (“the Coalition”) since 2013 to create this bill of rights.

“As I reflect on 2016 and the meaning of the holiday season, I’ve given a lot of thought to how we can best support our most vulnerable residents. That’s why I’m thrilled to be joined by over sixty of my colleagues in standing up and saying that all of our citizens, regardless of their housing status, should be afforded the same basic rights,” remarked Representative Pignatelli.

The letter was endorsed by 62 legislators from across the Commonwealth, including Senator Patricia Jehlen (D-Somerville), the Assistant Vice-Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means and Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs. She echoed Representative Pignatelli in expressing support for the bill of rights, saying, “I hope to see this bill passed as soon as possible because all Massachusetts residents deserve equal rights, regardless of their housing status.”

During a recent State House briefing on the bill, Christine, a Revere mother of three daughters, spoke of the importance of passing the bill of rights. She experienced health-jeopardizing discrimination during the time she spent without permanent housing and recounted one of several experiences of discrimination in medical settings. “To be honest, I think that when people realize that you’re homeless, they see it as a personal weakness. They see you as a weaker person, not as a whole person. They feel like they can treat you anyway they want to, because who are people going to believe?” she lamented.

“As the clock winds down on the 2015-2016 legislative session, the Coalition will continue to work with our extended network to elevate the stories of people like Christine and to push for passage of legislation to create a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness. This bill is a key priority of the Coalition, in our broader work to improve housing opportunities, expand homelessness prevention resources, and strengthen support services to move toward the goal of truly ending and preventing homelessness. We look forward to continuing to work with Chairman Dempsey, Representative Pignatelli, Senator Jehlen, and the full Legislature to get this bill across the finish line,” said Kelly Turley of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless.

Coalition members and allies have been calling, emailing, and visiting legislators, to encourage House and Senate members to actively work for passage of the bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness.

For more information on House Bill 1129, please follow these links:

- Sign-on letter: <http://www.mahomeless.org/advocacy/item/bill-of-rights-advocacy-12-16>
- House Bill 1129 fact sheet: <http://www.mahomeless.org/images/Fact Sheet on Bill of Rights for organizations 1-14-16.pdf>
- Legislative page: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/189/House/H1129>

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