

House Bill Would Waive Fees, Eliminate Address Requirement For State IDs

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Update: In a Facebook comment, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless informed Spare Change News the bill didn't pass, and said "we will be working to move it forward during the informal legislative sessions between now and the end of December." The original Spare Change news article on the bill follows below.

The Massachusetts House of Representatives is expected to vote this week on a bill that would remove barriers for homeless individuals trying to obtain state identification cards. The bill — which has a voting deadline of July 31 — would waive the current \$25 fee and ease address restrictions for all homeless adults and unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 24.

Historically, the homeless population has largely been barred from participating in society economically and politically as a result of, among other reasons, unaffordable identification cards. According to the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, lacking ID can keep the homeless from seeking an education, applying for jobs, opening bank accounts, entering certain buildings, or getting a library card. These restrictions systematically oppress an already underprivileged demographic, greatly reducing their chances of improving their lives. Supporters of this bill believe that by removing any fees associated with obtaining an ID card and loosening limitations on what homeless people may put down as a permanent address, a path to self-sufficiency becomes more viable.

"Obtaining a state identification card is a critical first step for youth and adults experiencing homelessness to accomplish typical life tasks and access opportunities," said Kelly Turley, Associate Director of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. "These commonsense, low-cost changes to RMV practices would improve upon Massachusetts' commitment to human and civil rights."

The bill, titled "An Act to Provide Identification to Homeless Youth and Families," was unanimously passed by the Senate on June 28; it was then sent to the committee on House Ways and Means earlier this month, where it has been since.

"We are working diligently to ensure that the bill comes up for a vote in the House of Representatives," said Turley. "If the bill does not pass by tomorrow, we will be working with our key legislative allies, people experiencing homelessness, and advocacy partners on a strategy to push the bill during informal legislative sessions, which will continue until the end of December."

While informal sessions will continue until the end of the year, Turley says that passing bills during this time can be an arduous task. Pushes for legislation can easily be derailed with the opposition of just one representative, and keep a vote from getting anywhere. Still, she remains hopeful that the bill will pass, and on its ability to create positive change.

"While we need to address major issues such as the affordable housing crisis, economic inequality, racism, and homophobia to end homelessness across the Commonwealth," Turley said. "Massachusetts can take a step to improve quality of life by passing this bill now."

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