



**Testimony in Support of An Act to Provide Identification to Homeless Youth and Families (Senate Bill 1906)
Presented to the Joint Committee on Transportation by Kelly Turley, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
December 6, 2017**

Good afternoon, Chairman McGee, Chairman Straus, and members of the Committee. My name is Kelly Turley, and I am the Associate Director of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 1906, An Act to provide identification to homeless youth and families. This first-time bill, filed by Senator Harriette Chandler, seeks to eliminate barriers often encountered by people experiencing homelessness when trying to access a Massachusetts identification card. (Its companion bill, House Bill 2737, was filed by Representative Kay Khan and heard by this committee last month.)

As I discussed at the previous hearing, many of us take having an ID card or driver's license for granted, and do not appreciate the doors that an ID card can open. Unfortunately, the consequences of not having an identification card become painfully clear very quickly for people experiencing homelessness. Without an ID card, simple everyday tasks can become insurmountable, such as applying for a job, enrolling in school, signing up for a library card, establishing a bank account, accessing certain government buildings, receiving needed supports and services, picking up prescription medications, and proving one's identity when interacting with the police.

In talking to unaccompanied youth, adults, and families experiencing homelessness, we know that both the \$25 application fee and the required verifications are barriers to obtaining a Mass ID. In last year's Massachusetts Youth Count, the annual statewide survey of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability, 17% of the young people currently experiencing homelessness cited not having an ID as a barrier to accessing vital services and resources. Based on preliminary data from the 2017 Youth Count, 43 of the 501 (9%) young people experiencing homelessness out on their own at the time of the survey identified not having an ID as a barrier.

Using the federal McKinney-Vento Act definition of homelessness, which includes people "lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence", Senate Bill 1906 would ease access to IDs for people staying in shelters, in doubled-up situations with family members or friends, motels, campgrounds, places not meant for human habitation, and other unstable and inadequate locations.

By passing and implementing this bill, Massachusetts would establish a fee waiver process for people experiencing homelessness. Free or reduced cost IDs already are available to people experiencing homelessness in neighboring Connecticut and Rhode Island (as well as in California, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, North Carolina, North Dakota, and South Carolina, as of summer 2016). Maine offers \$5 identification cards to residents regardless of their housing status.

Senate Bill 1906 also would create a process for individuals experiencing homelessness to receive Mass IDs if they cannot meet the general, existing criteria. This would include allowing alternative proof of Massachusetts residency that does not require a permanent address by looking to documents already accepted by other Massachusetts state agencies. In recent conversations with the Registry of Motor Vehicles and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, we also have discussed allowing unaccompanied youth to access Mass IDs by providing the signature of an alternative responsible adult instead of a parent or guardian. We have suggested that this list could include teachers, social workers, shelter staff, clergy members, medical providers, and legal advocates who know these young people and could sign off on their applications.

As Massachusetts moves closer to becoming compliant with federal REAL ID Act requirements, quick action is needed so that people experiencing homelessness are not left further behind as they seek housing, employment, and other

resources.

Please join with the 23 sponsors/cosponsors of the House and Senate bills, the growing list of organizational endorsers, and people of conscience from across the Commonwealth in implementing these commonsense, critical changes to state policies on access to identification cards. We respectfully ask you to please report out Senate Bill 1906 and House Bill 2737 swiftly and favorably.

Thank you again for your time and your commitment to preventing and ending homelessness here in Massachusetts. As we work toward that shared goal, legislation like Senate Bill 1906 is needed to ensure human rights, dignity, safety, and opportunity.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17.



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