



HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS

HOUSE BILL 1129

Lead Sponsor:

Representative William Smitty Pignatelli

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



Statements from Shelter and Service Providers in Support of House Bill 1129 to Create a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness December 2016-January 2017

Statement from Y2Y Harvard Square Shelter:

Homelessness is a difficult, draining experience even without the discrimination that so often accompanies it. Such discrimination faced by individuals experiencing homelessness has deep material and psychological effects, both of which hinder the ability of the individual to eventually achieve permanent housing. The Homeless Bill of Rights (House Bill 1129) would protect those experiencing homelessness by making explicit the rights they already possess as residents of the commonwealth, from free usage of public space to equal treatment by state and municipal agencies to the right to vote.

As a young adult shelter that ultimately seeks to end homelessness altogether, Y2Y views discrimination on the basis of homelessness as an immense barrier to this end goal. Please join us in removing these obstacles to finding permanent housing and eventually render homelessness an experience of the past.

Contacts: Lily Velona, Allison Torsiglieri, and Sarah Rosenkrantz

Statement from Emmanuel Church (Boston):

To the House Ways and Means Committee,

Emmanuel Church in the City of Boston serves as a refuge and sanctuary for hundreds of people each week who are without housing or who are marginally sheltered. Those who lack housing suffer collateral indignities such as loss of privacy and personal property, loss of freedom from harassment and discrimination, and disenfranchisement. We urge the House Ways and Means Committee to make every effort to ensure that the rights of all Massachusetts residents are protected, whether those residents have a home address or not.

Sincerely,
The Rev. Pamela L. Werntz
Rector

Statement from First Church Shelter (Cambridge):

As 2016 comes to a close, it is hard not reflect on the relative ease with which the Commonwealth found the will and resources to help General Electric move into Boston but-so far-failed to provide its most vulnerable citizens the basic respect and dignity offered by the Homeless Bill of Rights.

The "cost" of the Bill of Rights is basically ZERO in terms of dollars in the state budget. The guarantees of basic protections in terms of their person and possessions and rights to fair treatment that the bill would provide homeless women and men would, however, be enormous and long overdue.

I have administered shelters and other services for homeless individuals in Massachusetts for over 30 years. Nothing in the proposed Homeless Bill of Rights --in anyway-- could, or should, be interpreted as creating additional or onerous obligations for those providing services to the homeless.

All those working with and on behalf of the homeless should be joining their voices in support of the prompt enactment of the Homeless Bill of Rights before the end of the current legislative session.

Contact:

Jim Stewart

Director

Statement from the Boston Public Health Commission:

As a senior social worker, I oversee/administer crucial services to the mental health department [75% of those with co-occurring chronic medical and substance abuse diagnoses] at Woods Mullen and the new men's shelter at 112 Southamton Street. The Commission has been in favor of Bill 1129 (officially) as of January 2016. We are working hard to prioritize housing first and destigmatize mental health and substance abuse services. Accordingly, this bill is essential for our clients so they can access services with dignity, respect, and without being re-traumatized.

Currently, I have to equip guests with mental health alerts, medication lists, and step by step instructions on how to respond to police, organizations [including employers and local public areas] so they are not discriminated against. This bill will help the Commission's goal of increasing access to mental health/ substance abuse services [especially helping people utilize emergency shelters], enhance housing/employment opportunities, and preserve the dignity and worth of Boston's most vulnerable.

Contact:

Rainer Goldberg, LICSW

Senior Social Worker

Woods Mullen and 112 Southamton Shelters

Full List of Organizational Endorsers of House Bill 1129

American Friends Service Committee Material Aid & Advocacy Program
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Arise for Social Justice

Boston Homeless Solidarity Committee

Boston Public Health Commission

Boston Women's Fund

Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
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City Life Vida Urbana

City Mission Boston

Community Works

Emmanuel Church in the City of Boston

Family Promise MetroWest

First Church Shelter

Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
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My Brother's Table

Poor People's United Fund

Roca

Samaritans Steps, Inc.

Servicenet Inc.

Somerville Homeless Coalition

South Congregational Church

Spare Change News/Homeless Empowerment Project (HEP)
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Women's Lunch Place

Y2Y Harvard Square
