



SHERRY OGBUDIKE

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

The Bill of Rights seeks to outline those rights so as 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 he or she is experiencing homelessness.”

The rights included in the Homeless Bill of Rights are the right to move freely in public spaces, the right to equal treatment by municipal agencies, 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.

HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS

HOUSE BILL 1129

An Act Relative to Establishing a Homeless Bill of Rights

LEAD SPONSORS: Representative William Smitty Pignatelli

My name is Sherry Ogbudike and I’m 59-years old. I’ve never been homeless before now. I’ve been close, but I’ve always been able to work it out due to the fact that I’m employed. I had owed my landlord a lot of money, and we had an agreement with the court. Then he sold the property, and the new landlord wanted the money before the end of the month. I just picked up the phone and started calling shelters.

I haven’t been homeless very long, but just the interactions I’ve had trying to find help since then have been very inhumane. You’re supposed to treat everyone like they’re a normal person, no matter who they are, and I think it should be the same with homeless people. Most of the people I’ve met at this shelter are just normal, everyday people, but they don’t always get treated that way.

People at work treat me differently now that I’m homeless. They’ve been saying things like, “Are you bringing bed bugs to work? They have bed bugs in those shelters.” I haven’t told everybody, but I haven’t kept it a secret either. There’s a faith community I belong to on Facebook, and they’ve been very supportive. This is a difficult thing to go through. In many ways, you are moving into situations you have never been in before.

In the group home, we do a house meeting every week, and every week we talk about a human right of the week. I’ve played human rights bingo, and instead of B-I-N-G-O it was R-I-G-H-T-S. We did this so people would know all of their rights. Everyone else has their rights protected, and I think there should be a homeless bill of rights so people will treat people experiencing homelessness with respect and dignity.

