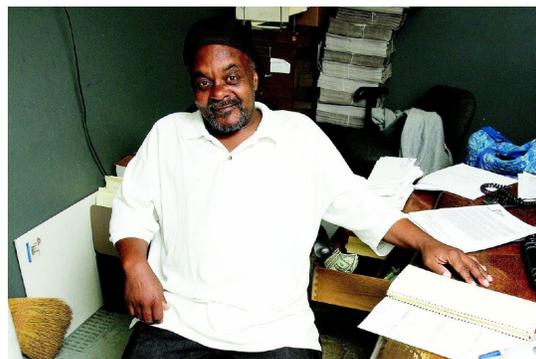


IDs For the Homeless are Common Sense

News Opinion Slider May 28, 2019 By James Shearer



"Having an ID card is instrumental to giving folks pathways out of poverty," says Molly Schulman, Community Organizer and Legislative Advocate with the Massachusetts Coalition For the Homeless. She, along with Associate Director Kelly Turley, are at the Massachusetts State House every day advocating on behalf of the homeless on everything from increasing funding for housing and other services for homeless youth and young adults, to RAFT, to voucher programs, and more.

They're also advocating for easier access to Mass ID's for homeless people, something that's a necessity.

"You need to apply for a job, enroll in an educational program, pick up mail from the post office, open a financial account, access services and so much more," says Schulman.

I agree — as someone who has been homeless, not having an ID for many years hampered me in many ways. I was lucky at points because the odd jobs I worked didn't require me to have one. Some accepted my food stamp ID because, after all, it was state issued. Still, I couldn't get a bank account or even a library card, oh, and good luck dealing with the police if you have no ID. Imagine if the climate toward undocumented immigrants today was like that in the 1980s — Lord only knows where I would be.

Not only does an ID help you in so many ways but it helps with your mental health as well: it confirms that you exist. If you've never been on the streets you probably have no clue what I'm talking about, but to lose all your identification with no way to get it back is horrible.

"It's unjust for folks experiencing homelessness to have to prove their Massachusetts residency and pay a \$25 fee to get a standard Mass. ID card, when there are so many other barriers to accessing opportunities and care," Schulman explains.

Yes, it is unjust. Just to get a standard ID you need things like a proof of citizenship, Social Security card, and proof that you are a resident of the state. Easy, right? Not when you're homeless. Many people don't have access to those documents, and some cost money to get, and, no, they won't accept a letter of residency from the shelter you're staying at, though that would make things easier.

So with all this information why isn't this a state policy? According to Turley, the legislation was filed by Senator Harriette Chandler and Representative Kay Khan in 2017, and refilled this January.

The bill makes common sense, doesn't it?

Thirteen other states have made it a policy, so what's the deal here? Isn't this liberal Massachusetts? A state that claims to help everybody, especially the downtrodden? There's a saying among us locals, that bills go to the State House to die. I don't believe that. It's more like bills for poor folk go there to die. But I digress.

And as Turley pointed out, the bill received unanimous support when it passed through the Senate last year — now it needs to make its way through the lower chamber.

"With enough support across the state I believe we can get this bill passed this session! People know that this bill exists," said Schulman. "It's my job as an organizer to galvanize people not only to care, but to act."

The key word is act. So just don't sit there, push yourself away from the telly and act!

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