



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender, Queer & Questioning Youth
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Esteemed Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation:

As Director of the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth, I am writing to share how lack of access to state IDs can negatively impact the lives of LGBTQ young people in the Commonwealth. This letter is meant to provide the Committee with additional details following my oral testimony provided on November 13, 2017, with respect to House Bill 2737 and Senate Bill 1906, “An Act to provide identification to homeless youth and families.”

Our conversations with community partners such as the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless have led us to believe that access to state IDs is problematic for people experiencing homelessness, especially youth. As it is the charge of the Commission to advise others in state government on how policies impact LGBTQ youth, we feel it important in this instance to share why LGBTQ youth are disproportionately impacted by poor access to identification documents.

First, LGBTQ youth represent a disproportionate share of the homeless population in Massachusetts. While LGBTQ youth are generally said to comprise about 10% of the population, and the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey has found that roughly 12.5% of high school students identify as LGBTQ,¹ the 2015 Youth Count Survey found that at least 22% of unaccompanied homeless youth were LGBTQ.² This means that LGBTQ youth are approximately twice as likely to be among the Commonwealth’s homeless population, a significant and deeply concerning disparity given our state’s leading status on other markers of LGBTQ equality. Adding to the problem of LGBTQ youth being out-of-home is that they are also more likely to be out-of-school, with LGBTQ youth being four times as likely as others to skip school because they feel unsafe.³ This is troubling but unsurprising given that these youths are much more likely to be bullied, to be in physical altercations, and to be threatened or injured by weapons while on school grounds.⁴

Second, many of the problems faced by people experiencing homeless when they cannot access identification, such as difficulty finding employment and accessing services,⁵ are already disproportionately faced by LGBTQ people due to discrimination. In this way, not having access to an ID compounds the burdens and marginalization already faced by LGBTQ people in our society, and adds to the victimization experienced by those experiencing homelessness. For

¹ Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2015. See our fact sheet at <http://tinyurl.com/myrbs15>

² Massachusetts Youth Count Survey, 2015. See pages 8-9 at http://www.mahomeless.org/images/Massachusetts_Youth_Count_2015.pdf

³ Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2015. See our fact sheet at <http://tinyurl.com/myrbs15>

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Fact sheet of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless on Senate Bill 1906 / House Bill 2737. 2017. See document at http://www.mahomeless.org/images/ID_card_bill_fact_sheet_11-10-17_for_members.pdf

example, a major study recently found that among transgender residents of Massachusetts, 22% had been denied a job or promotion because of their gender identity, 73% had faced mistreatment in schools, 52% had faced mistreatment by the police, and 31% had recently had a negative experience while trying to access healthcare services.⁶ Given the significant overlap in the issues faced by homeless persons who cannot acquire an ID and the LGBTQ population generally, it is easy to see how these problems can be compounded and intensified for the Commonwealth's significant population of LGBTQ homeless youth.

Finally, LGBTQ youth are more likely to need the very services that lacking an ID can have, for reasons beyond the simple fact that they are more likely to experience homelessness. For example, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that LGBTQ youth are more three times as likely to have been threatened or injured with a weapon at school, almost four times as likely to have contemplated suicide, and almost three times as likely to have experienced sexual assault compared to other youth.⁷ These are all situations in which youth should immediately seek health and social services, as well as the protection of law enforcement. However, youth who lack a state ID may delay or avoid seeking such services out of fear of being rejected due to their lack of identification, or may seek services and be denied for this reason. We know that more than one in ten homeless youth are unable to access needed services because they lacked proper identification,⁸ and this number is almost surely higher for LGBTQ youth who face intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization. When an LGBTQ youth who is experiencing homelessness is denied services or does not even attempt to access services because they lack a state document, they relive the victimization they have faced, such as rejection by their families and “falling through the cracks” of state services. It also means that the disparities LGBTQ youth face with respect to health and wellbeing – disparities that follow into adulthood – are allowed to persist in the Commonwealth.

Therefore, the Commission thanks the Joint Committee for its consideration of this issue and urges it to consider the dire effect that lack of state IDs has on youth experiencing homelessness, including the disproportionate effect it has on LGBTQ youth and other marginalized populations, such as youth of color. The Commission would happily provide further advice to members of the Committee with respect to these disparities.

Respectfully,



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⁶ Massachusetts State Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, 2017. See report at <http://tinyurl.com/matranssurvey>

⁷ Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2015. See our fact sheet at <http://tinyurl.com/myrbs15>

⁸ Massachusetts Youth Count Survey, 2015. See pages 15-16 at http://www.mahomeless.org/images/Massachusetts_Youth_Count_2015.pdf