

# SD.1332, An Act providing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness/HD.107 An Act establishing a bill of rights for individuals experiencing homelessness

Sponsors: Senator Becca Rausch (D-Needham)  
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## The Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness

This bill would protect the rights of people experiencing homelessness in four ways:

1. Extend anti-discrimination protections in Chapter 151B and Chapter 272 of the Massachusetts General Laws to persons experiencing homelessness, including protections when seeking employment, housing, voter registration, and access to public spaces and places of public accommodation.
2. Secure the right of persons experiencing homelessness to rest, seek shelter from the elements, occupy a legally parked car, pray, eat, and avoid needless harassment in public spaces.
3. Provide people experiencing homelessness the right to a private right of action in the event of a violation of their rights provided under this bill.
4. Repeal Sections 63 through 69 of Chapter 272 of the Massachusetts General Laws, which includes archaic and derogatory terminology and laws criminalizing homelessness.

## Context: Homelessness in Massachusetts

- According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's most recently published point-in-time count, **15,507 people were counted as experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts on a single night in 2022, including 1,135 individuals who were unsheltered.**
- Thousands of additional families, adults, and youth were unrepresented in the point-in-time count due to HUD's narrow definition of homelessness, which excludes individuals who are experiencing homelessness and living doubled up with family members or friends.
- According to preliminary data from the 2022 Massachusetts Youth Count, 61% of young people experiencing homelessness who participated in the survey were BIPOC/youth of color, 30% were LGBTQ+, and over 34% had been involved in the foster care system.

## Discrimination against people experiencing homelessness

- Nationally, municipalities have enacted ordinances against people experiencing homelessness and arrested people for acts of survival: sleeping in vehicles, asking for money, sharing food, and more. This bill would protect persons experiencing homelessness from these unfair policies in Massachusetts.
- Research consistently shows that people experiencing homelessness are working or want to work. In 2014, the National Coalition for the Homeless found that 70.4% of survey respondents experiencing homelessness reported being discriminated against by private businesses based on housing status.
- LGBTQ+ youth both in Massachusetts and nationally report being turned away from shelters. They also report instances of homophobia and transphobia while in shelters.

**Decriminalizing acts of survival in public spaces protects unsheltered people experiencing homelessness from needless harassment and costly and unnecessary involvement with the criminal justice system.**

**Providing civil rights protections to people experiencing homelessness will reduce the barriers they face trying to exit homelessness for good.**

For more information, please contact Jaime Watson, Office of Senator Rausch, at 617-722-1555 or [jaime.watson@masenate.gov](mailto:jaime.watson@masenate.gov) or Kelly Turley, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, at [kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org).