



MASSACHUSETTS
COALITION
FOR THE HOMELESS



Everyone Needs ID: Take Action to Provide Identification to Youth and Adults Experiencing Homelessness

Please cosponsor and actively support [House Bill 3388](#), [House Bill 3360](#), and [Senate Bill 2251](#), An Act to provide identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness

Sponsored by Representative Jim O'Day, Representative Kay Khan, and Senator Robyn Kennedy

Importance of this legislation: Obtaining a state identification card is a critical first step for youth and adults experiencing homelessness to accomplish typical life tasks and access opportunities. ID is required for a broad range of life activities, such as:

- Applying for jobs
- Enrolling in education programs
- Getting a library card
- Picking up a package from the post office
- Opening financial accounts
- Entering certain government buildings
- Accessing services
- Interacting with law enforcement

Unfortunately, there are significant barriers to accessing IDs for people experiencing homelessness, with some service providers previously estimating that half of their program participants lack identification cards.¹ In the most recent Massachusetts Youth Count, conducted in the spring of 2022 and released in March 2023, the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth further explored barriers that unaccompanied young people under the age of 25 faced in accessing needed resources and services. The survey found that many young people identified not having an ID or lacking key documents as a barrier to accessing services they needed, including 22% of young people who reported facing barriers to accessing cash assistance, 22% seeking nutritional assistance, 19% seeking health care, 17% seeking employment, 16% seeking long-term housing, and 16% seeking shelter or transitional housing.² In the previous Massachusetts Youth Count, conducted in the spring of 2021, the Commission found that of the 265 young people under the age of 25 responding to the survey who met the state's definition of being an unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, 28% identified not having an ID or lacking key documents as a barrier to accessing youth services they needed. The percentage was higher for several key subpopulations of youth and young adults: 40% of young people experiencing homelessness who had a history of justice system involvement; 38% of young people experiencing homelessness who were doubled up with family members or friends at the time of taking the Youth Count survey; 35% of young people experiencing homelessness who were unsheltered at the time of taking the Youth Count survey; and 33% of young people experiencing homelessness who identified that they had ever exchanged sex to meet basic needs.³

With the implementation of the REAL ID Act across the country, many states have recognized the need for an alternative identification card accessible to people experiencing homelessness, especially youth, who may lack the documentation necessary to obtain a REAL ID-compliant card. A growing number of states, such as California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey⁴, New York⁵, North Carolina, Oregon⁴, Pennsylvania⁶, South Carolina, Utah⁴, and Washington⁷, currently offer free or reduced fee cards for individuals experiencing homelessness, and many offer clear alternative criteria for individuals experiencing homelessness who cannot demonstrate proof of address.⁸

¹ Hussey, H. (2015). Expanding ID Card Access for LGBT Homeless Youth. Center for American Progress. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8h46az>. Most recently accessed April 11, 2023.

² Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. (2023.) Massachusetts Youth Count 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/yc22report>. Most recently accessed April 18, 2023.

³ Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. (2022.) Massachusetts Youth Count 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/yc21report>. Most recently accessed April 18, 2023.

⁴ SchoolHouse Connection. (2023). State Laws on Vital Records. <https://tinyurl.com/4jmczdhe>. Most recently accessed April 12, 2023.

⁵ See <https://tinyurl.com/yax73pcj>. Most recently accessed April 12, 2023.

⁶ Cassi, S. 'Simply the Right Thing to Do': PennDOT Offers Free IDs for People Without Housing. Lehighvalleylive.com. <https://tinyurl.com/2tti69xs>. Most recently accessed April 12, 2023.

⁷ Van de Venter, K. (2023). WA Now Offers Free ID Card to Homeless Residents. NBC Right Now. <https://tinyurl.com/4hjeu56k>. Most recently accessed April 12, 2023.

⁸ Mirza, S., Soto, S. and Rooney, C. (2016). State ID Card Policies for LGBTQ Youths Experiencing Homelessness. Center for American Progress. <https://tinyurl.com/2nbdd7j9>. Most recently accessed April 11, 2023.

It is time for Massachusetts to step up and join those states that are addressing this issue, especially at a time when the Commonwealth's severe housing crisis complicates achieving housing stability for families and individuals experiencing homelessness. This bill would:

- Establish a fee waiver process for youth and adults experiencing homelessness seeking standard Mass IDs
- Create a process for individuals experiencing homelessness to apply for standard Mass IDs if they cannot meet the existing criteria by allowing ID applicants who are experiencing homelessness to submit residency documentation from providers of homelessness and/or youth services and state agencies under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS)
- Expand upon the Registry of Motor Vehicles' efforts to better serve people experiencing homelessness ⁹

Who has already cosponsored the Everyone Needs ID bill? As of September 19th, the bill has been sponsored or cosponsored by Representatives O'Day (sponsor), Khan (sponsor), Arena-DeRosa, Arriaga, Ashe, Blais, Cataldo, Connolly, Doherty, Domb, Donahue, Duffy, Farley-Bouvier, Garballey, Garry, Gentile, Higgins, Holmes, Honan, Howard, Kushmerek, LeBoeuf, Lipper-Garabedian, Madaro, Montañó, Murray, Sabadosa, Tyler, and Ultrino, and Senators Robyn Kennedy (sponsor), Collins, Comerford, DiDomenico, Eldridge, Gomez, Lovely, Rausch, Velis, and former Senator Gobi.

Which organizations have endorsed the Everyone Needs ID bill? As of September 19th, the bill has been endorsed by Abby's House, Alliance of Cambridge Tenants (ACT), Allston Brighton Health Collaborative, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Massachusetts, Berkshire Housing, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP), Brazilian Women's Group, Breaktime, Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Catholic Charities Worcester County, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, Children's League of Massachusetts, Citizens for Juvenile Justice, Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc., Community Service Network, Inc., Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, Disability Law Center, Dismas House, Duffy Health Center, Faith Leaders Seeking Justice for Those Affected by Homelessness, Fall River Comprehensive Treatment Center, Family Health Center of Worcester, Family Promise North Shore Boston, Father Bill's & MainSpring, Fenway Health, First Church Shelter, Franklin County DIAL SELF Inc., Friends of Boston's Homeless, Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), Grow Food Northampton, Housing Families, Inc., JRI Health, Justice 4 Housing, JVS Boston, Lazarus House Inc., LEO, Inc., Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance (MHSA), Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Mass Senior Action Council, Matthew Aronson Consulting, MLPB, My Life My Choice, One Family, On the Rise, Opportunity Communities, LLC, Park Avenue Congregational Church, Poor People's United Fund, Progressive Massachusetts, Roca, Inc., Rosie's Place, Safe Passage, School on Wheels of MA, SeniorCare Inc., Somerville Community Corporation, Southeast Center for Independent Living, St. Clare of Assisi, Temple Sinai of Sharon, Inc., The Center for Teen Empowerment, United South End Settlements, United Way of Greater Fall River, Vasquez Mary Kay, Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, YWCA Cambridge, and Y2Y Network.

Bill history: The three bills were filed in January 2023 and assigned to the Joint Committee on Transportation between February and March 2023. The committee heard the bills on June 13, 2023. Senate Bill 2251 was sent to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means and promptly passed the Senate unanimously on July 27, 2023. That version is now awaiting action in the House Committee on Ways and Means. In each of the last three legislative sessions (starting in 2017), the Joint Committee on Transportation and Senate Committee on Ways and Means reported out favorably similar versions of the Mass ID access bill and the full Senate unanimously passed the bills.

Please actively support swift passage of the #EveryoneNeedsID Mass ID Access bill to increase access for people experiencing homelessness to standard Mass IDs.

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless: kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17.

- Last updated September 19, 2023

⁹ See <https://www.mass.gov/guides/rmv-real-id-info-center#homeless-individuals>. Most recently accessed April 11, 2023.