Our Opinion: Pass bill protecting rights of homeless

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Like the heroin epidemic (see editorial above), homelessness is not only a growing problem in the state it is one that can only be addressed if stereotypes are shattered.

Homelessness, like heroin addiction, is perceived as an urban problem when in fact is everywhere, including the Berkshires. Like heroin addiction, it is not confined to certain social or economic groups. Economic realities mean that it could affect anyone if unfortunate enough.

Representative William "Smitty" Pignatelli, a Lenox Democrat, has filed legislation that will assure that the rights of the homeless are protected. It was suggested to him by a constituent who noted that other states have passed similar legislation that has enjoyed success in recent years. (Eagle, January 3).

The bill assures the homeless their rights to unemployment benefits and access to medical care and public spaces and buildings. It protects the right to privacy and to confidentiality of public records. In exchange, the homeless must respect the rights of others.

The concept of the homeless conjures certain simplistic and cliched mental images. Someone who gets laid off and/or loses their house or apartment and temporarily moves in with a friend is homeless and just one step from the street. If that person’s rights are protected, it will be easier for he or she to regain independence. Representative Pignatelli hopes his bill will become law this year, as do we.