

**BILL OF RIGHTS
FOR PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS**

**HOUSE DOCKET 2776
AND SENATE DOCKET 1952**

Lead Sponsors:
Representative William Smitty Pignatelli
and Senator Becca Rausch

The Homeless Bill of Rights would entitle those experiencing homelessness to the same rights as any other resident of Massachusetts.

Lead Sponsors: Representative William Smitty Pignatelli and Senator Rebecca Rausch

House Cosponsors: Representative Carmine Gentile

Senate Cosponsors: Senator Jason Lewis

Summary: An Act providing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness (House Docket 2776 and Senate Docket 1952) would establish a definition of homelessness and protect key rights of all residents, whether or not they are experiencing homelessness. The bills are modeled after landmark legislation passed in 2012 in Rhode Island. Similar legislation has passed since in Connecticut, Illinois, and Puerto Rico.

Bill Status: The bills were refiled in January 2019, and are awaiting committee assignments. In spite of considerable support, the bill did not pass last session. We are hopeful that the momentum from last session and the pressing need to uphold human rights and dignity will propel the bills forward this session.

Why is it necessary to create a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness?

People experiencing homelessness often are subjected to discrimination and mistreatment based on their housing status. The bill of rights is a guide for state and local officials emphasizing that people experiencing homelessness are entitled to the same rights as any other resident of Massachusetts. The bill of rights seeks to outline those rights so as to prevent discrimination based on housing status. The legislation recognizes the increased prevalence of homelessness in Massachusetts due to widespread economic hardship, the insufficient availability of safe, affordable housing, and a weakened social safety net.

“No person’s rights, privileges, or access to public services may be denied or abridged solely because they are experiencing homelessness.” The rights specifically included in the bill of rights are

the right to move freely in public spaces, the right to equal treatment by municipal agencies (such as police departments), freedom from discrimination in employment, the right to emergency medical care, the right to register to vote and to vote, freedom from disclosure of records, and the right to a reasonable expectation of privacy of property.

The bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness seeks to have the rights outlined be treated as a statement of legislative intent, as a guide for state and municipal agencies.

Organizational Endorsers (as of January 2019):

AIDS Action/Fenway Health
AIDS Project Worcester
Boston Center for Independent Living
Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc.
Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries
DIAL/SELF Youth & Community Services
HomeStart, Inc.
Martin Richard Institute for Social Justice
Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless

Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth
Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance
Rosie's Place
Stop Bullying Coalition
Wayside Youth & Family Support
Western MA Network to End Homelessness
Y2Y Network

**Protect the Rights of All Residents of Massachusetts: Please cosponsor and actively support
An Act Providing a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness, House Docket
2776/Senate Docket 1952!**

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley, Associate Director, at kelly@mahomeless.org, 781-595-7570 x17
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