



BILL OF RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESS

HOUSE BILL 695 AND SENATE BILL 46

Lead Sponsor:
Representative William Smitty Pignatelli
and Senator Linda Dorcena Forry

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



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House Cosponsors: Representatives Brian Ashe, Cory Atkins, Ruth Balsler, Christine Barber, Antonio Cabral, Thomas Calter, James Cantwell, Gailanne Cariddi, Gerard Cassidy, Mike Connolly, Michael Day, Marjorie Decker, Daniel Donahue, Michelle DuBois, Carolyn Dykema, Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Michael Finn, Sean Garballey, Carmine Gentile, Susan Gifford, Solomon Goldstein-Rose, Kenneth Gordon, Stephan Hay, Jonathan Hecht, Kay Khan, Jack Lewis, David Linsky, Jay Livingstone, Adrian Madaro, Elizabeth Malia, Paul McMurtry, Mathew Muratore, James O'Day, Alice Peisch, Denise Provost, Angelo Puppolo, David Rogers, Byron Rushing, Frank Smizik, Thomas Stanley, Jose Tosado, Paul Tucker, Steven Ultrino, Aaron Vega, and Chris Walsh.

Senate Cosponsors: Senators Michael Brady, William Brownsberger, Sonia Chang-Diaz, Sal DiDomenico, Eileen Donoghue, James Eldridge, Jason Lewis, Joan Lovely, Thomas McGee, Mark Montigny, and Michael Moore.

Summary: An Act providing a homeless bill of rights (House Bill 695) and An Act creating a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness (Senate Bill 46) 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 since passed in Connecticut and Illinois.

Bill Status: The bills were filed in January 2017. H.695 has been sent to the Joint Committee on Housing, while S.46 has been sent to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities. The bills are nearly identical to House Bill 1129 from the 2015-2016 session. That bill was reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Housing in December 2015 and sent to the House Committee on Ways and Means. 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 he or she is 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:

Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
American Friends Service Committee Material Aid & Advocacy Program
Arise for Social Justice
Boston Homeless Solidarity Committee
Boston Public Health Commission
Boston Women's Fund
Bridge Over Troubled Waters
Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
City Life Vida Urbana
City Mission Boston
Community Works
Emmanuel Church in the City of Boston
Family Promise MetroWest
First Church Shelter
Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
My Brother's Table
New Bedford Homeless Advocates Inc.
Poor People's United Fund
Roca
Samaritans Steps, Inc.
ServiceNet, Inc.
Somerville Homeless Coalition
South Congregational Church
Spare Change News/Homeless Empowerment Project (HEP)
Tapestry Health
Women's Lunch Place
Y2Y Harvard Square

(List as of April 5, 2017)

Protect the Rights of All Residents of Massachusetts: Actively Support An Act Providing a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness, House Bill 695/Senate Bill 46!

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

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