



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities  
In support of H.264/S.142 An Act providing a bill of rights for people experiencing  
homelessness

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These identical bills define homeless persons as those who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. Rights and protections enumerated include use of public spaces, privacy in their personal property in public spaces, interaction with public officials and public employees and law enforcement officers without harassment, resting in public spaces and seeking protection from adverse weather, eating in public spaces where not prohibited, and occupying a legally-parked vehicle. Discrimination is prohibited because of housing status. Laws are repealed that define and criminalize persons for being a vagrant, tramp or vagabond. Public accommodations are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of housing status. New language in this bill over previously-filed bills entitles people experiencing homelessness to routine and emergency medical care. The right to vote is stated, including registering to vote and receiving documentation to prove identity for voting. All persons are entitled to equal treatment by state and municipal agencies.

There has been a history in the Commonwealth of treating persons who are homeless with disrespect and sometimes cruelty, often increasing the discomfort and trauma of their situation. Such treatment is particularly wrong when carried out by public officials and law enforcement officers and is certainly not helpful to getting appropriate housing. We want such practices to end and for the public generally to recognize the human dignity and equal rights of all persons, including those persons who are temporarily homeless.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports these bills based on its national positions on Social Policy and Meeting Basic Human Needs as well as Voting Rights. We believe that equal rights and equal opportunity should be secured for all; we promote social and economic justice and health and safety for all Americans. Privacy should be protected. All administrative procedures should be conducted with respect for the rights and dignity of the individuals. Based on our long-standing promotion of citizen participation in government, we also believe that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed.

The Massachusetts League with 47 chapters across Massachusetts from the Berkshires to Cape Cod. urges the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities to take action to report favorably on this "Bill of Rights" for people experiencing homelessness as spelled out in H.264/S.142. We also ask you to use your influence to ensure it is enacted in this 192<sup>nd</sup> session of the legislature.