



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Transportation
In support of H.3360, H.3388 and S.2251
An Act to provide identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports these identical bills which require the Registry of Motor Vehicles to establish a process to provide identification cards to persons who are homeless or unaccompanied homeless youth. Proof of residency could be provided by satisfactory documentation from entities that provide housing or youth services in the Commonwealth or other services from a department of the Office of Health and Human Services. The definitions of “homeless” come from the federal McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (1987, as amended). “Unaccompanied homeless youth” means a person who is age 24 or younger and is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or guardian and lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.

Identification cards (IDs) are often essential for a broad range of life activities such as applying for a job, enrolling in education programs, opening financial accounts, picking up packages at the post office, entering certain government buildings, interacting with law enforcement, and accessing many services. IDs are also necessary for initial voter registration. The life circumstances of homeless individuals such as rapid loss of residence due to fire, disaster, violence, or relationship failure often makes it difficult to access and/or maintain those documents ordinarily used to prove residence. This is particularly true for homeless youth who may have been ejected from their parental home or are in the midst of hostile relationships that prevent them from going to their former homes.

The bill provides for alternative documentation for IDs from government and non-profit organizations that are already involved with services to homeless adults and youth and can vouch for them. Although IDs are now available from the Registry of Motor Vehicles that don’t relate to driving skills, such IDs do require an in-person visit and cost \$5 per year or \$25 for five years. This bill would make IDs for homeless adults and youth free. To most of us, the current cost may seem trivial, but when one is homeless, to come up with cash for everything needed can be a huge barrier. The financial loss to the Registry and the Commonwealth will be offset by the tremendous value of an ID to the person who receives it.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has long time positions in support of Basic Human Needs and Citizen Rights. Quoting from our national statement of positions called Impact on Issues 2022-2024: “In order to prevent or reduce poverty, LWVUS supports policies and programs designed to increase job opportunities; increase access to health insurance; provide support services such as child care and transportation; provide opportunities and/or incentives for basic or remedial education and job training...” From Preventing and Reducing Poverty, p. 146.

“The League of Women Voters believes every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.” From Principles, p. 10.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts is a broad-based organization with 44 local leagues across the Commonwealth from the Berkshires to Cape Cod. We urge the Joint Committee on Transportation to approve House Bills 3360 and 3368 and Senate Bill 2251 promptly in order to provide essential identification cards to vulnerable homeless adults and youth. Furthermore, we hope you will use your influence to promote enactment in this 193rd session and see that the Registry of Motor Vehicles carries out this process with dispatch.

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