



PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY

June 9, 2023

The Honorable Brendan P. Crighton

Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Transportation

The Honorable William M. Straus

House Chair, Joint Committee on Transportation

Dear Chair Crighton, Chair Straus, and Committee members,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of 58 members, providers and advocates of child and family services across the Commonwealth. Together we promote the availability, accessibility, and quality of these needed services that promote the safety, health, and well-being of children and families. Our members know first-hand the struggles faced by vulnerable people in the Commonwealth, including youth who are transitioning from the foster care and juvenile justice systems into adulthood and so often face homelessness, as well as the many child welfare system-involved families who face homelessness as well.

On behalf of our members and those they serve, we are writing today to testify in support of "**An Act to Provide Identification to Youth and Adults Experiencing Homelessness**" ([H.3388](#), [H.3360](#), [S.2251](#)).

Many Children and Families are Facing Homelessness

With widespread homelessness due to economic hardship, insufficient availability of safe, affordable housing, and a weakened social safety net, the time is now to support this population. In 2022, 9,976 people experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts were families with children, which had the largest increase of any state with 3,141 more people in families with children in 2022 than 2020.¹ There were also 365 unaccompanied youth many of whom have lived experience in the child welfare system.² Each year, 20,000-30,000 young adults nationally, including 600-1,000+ in Massachusetts, age out of foster care and 25%-40% of these young adults become homeless within four years.³

Without IDs Critical Services Cannot Be Accessed

¹ The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. December 2022

² *Id.*

³ The Foster-Care-to-Homelessness Pipeline, April Tate, Breaktime, July 23, 2021.



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People experiencing homelessness already face significant barriers accessing identification (ID) cards, which are a basic tool for accessing services. Some service providers estimate that half of their program participants lack ID cards. A recent survey by the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth found that many young people identified not having an ID or key documents as a barrier to accessing needed services, e.g., cash assistance, nutritional assistance, health care, employment, long-term housing, and shelter or transitional housing.⁴ Besides the important life activities noted above, ID is required to open financial accounts, interact with law enforcement, enroll in education programs, and more. With the implementation of the REAL ID Act across the country, many states have recognized the need for an alternative identification card accessible to people experiencing homelessness, especially youth, who may lack the documentation necessary to obtain a REAL ID-compliant card.

An identification card is an easily removed barrier that would immediately improve access to critical safety net services for thousands of Massachusetts residents. We urge the Committee to report this bill favorably and work for its passage without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Gwaltney".

Rachel Gwaltney
Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts

⁴ Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. (2023.) Massachusetts Youth Count 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/yc22report>. Most recently accessed April 18, 2023.