

Connecticut Passes Landmark ‘Homeless Person’s Bill Of Rights’ Law

By Scott Keyes on Jun 12, 2013 at 10:30 am



(Credit: Shutterstock)

Connecticut is on the cusp of enacting a major new law to protect people who are homeless from discrimination.

Last week, Connecticut lawmakers passed the “Homeless Person’s Bill Of Rights” at the literal 11th hour — 11:30pm on June 5th, one half hour before the legislative session ended. The bill, SB 896, a landmark piece of legislation to protect homeless individuals’ rights, adds homeless people as a protected class who can’t be discriminated against in employment, housing, or public accommodations. It also includes protections for homeless people to move freely in public spaces, such as parks and sidewalks, without being singled out for harassment by law enforcement officers.

Here are the bill’s seven protections:

- (1) Move freely in public spaces, including on public sidewalks, in public parks, on public transportation and in public buildings without harassment or intimidation from law enforcement officers in the same manner as other persons;
- (2) Have equal opportunities for employment;
- (3) Receive emergency medical care;
- (4) Register to vote and to vote;
- (5) Have personal information protected;

- (6) Have a reasonable expectation of privacy in his or her personal property; and
- (7) Receive equal treatment by state and municipal agencies.

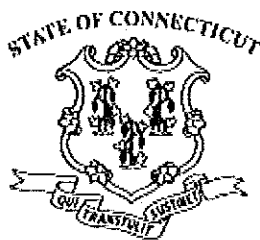
This is no symbolic victory, Michael Stoops, Director of Community Organizing at the National Coalition for the Homeless, explained. "Homeless people are regularly discriminated against in employment and housing," Stoops told ThinkProgress.

Nate Fox, Project Supervisor for Faces Of Homelessness Connecticut, a group that advocated for the bill, hailed its passage. "Currently, there are certain civil liberties that could be automatically wiped out when you walked into a homeless shelter," Fox told ThinkProgress. This bill not only fixes that unintended side effect of shelters and other homeless services, it's also "changed the conversation on how to protect homeless persons' rights," Fox said.

The bill now awaits Gov. Dan Malloy's (D) signature before it can take effect at its scheduled date of October 1, 2013. It will not only play a major role in preventing discrimination against homeless people; it could also have an effect on municipalities like Hartford which currently have anti-loitering and anti-panhandling ordinances.

If it ultimately becomes law, Connecticut will become just the second state in the nation to enact a Homeless Person's Bill of Rights. Last year, Rhode Island became the first state to do so. Illinois could increase the number to three if Gov. Pat Quinn (D) signs a bill which passed the legislature recently, and other states like Oregon and Delaware are considering similar legislation.

<http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2013/06/12/2139181/connecticut-homeless/?mobile=nc>



Substitute Senate Bill No. 896

Public Act No. 13-251

AN ACT CONCERNING A HOMELESS PERSON'S BILL OF RIGHTS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (Effective October 1, 2013) (a) There is created a Homeless Person's Bill of Rights to guarantee that the rights, privacy and property of homeless persons are adequately safeguarded and protected under the laws of this state. The rights afforded homeless persons to ensure that their person, privacy and property are safeguarded and protected, as set forth in subsection (b) of this section, are available only insofar as they are implemented in accordance with other parts of the general statutes, state rules and regulations, federal law, the state Constitution and the United States Constitution. For purposes of this section, "homeless person" shall have the same meaning as in 42 USC 11302, as amended from time to time.

(b) Each homeless person in this state has the right to:

- (1) Move freely in public spaces, including on public sidewalks, in public parks, on public transportation and in public buildings without harassment or intimidation from law enforcement officers in the same manner as other persons;
- (2) Have equal opportunities for employment;
- (3) Receive emergency medical care;
- (4) Register to vote and to vote;
- (5) Have personal information protected;
- (6) Have a reasonable expectation of privacy in his or her personal property; and
- (7) Receive equal treatment by state and municipal agencies.

(c) Each municipality may post in the usual location for municipal notices a notice entitled "HOMELESS PERSON'S BILL OF RIGHTS" that contains the text set forth in subsection (b) of this section.

