

Senate okays 'Homeless Bill of Rights'

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New legislation sponsored by Sen. Tassoni

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- By Evan Viola

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (WPRI) - The Rhode Island Senate passed legislation Wednesday backed by Senator John J. Tassoni Jr., that aims to establish a "Homeless Bill of Rights" in Rhode Island.

According to the General Assembly, the legislation will "guarantee that no person's rights, privileges or access to public services will be denied or abridged solely because he or she is homeless".

Rhode Island will be the first state in the nation to adopt such a law if passed by the General Assembly.

"We know what the unemployment rates are and we know that nearly one in two Americans is living near or at poverty level," said Senator Tassoni.

"We can't just shrug and say 'too bad', we need to do more."

The bill guarantees rights to homeless individuals including:

- The right to be free from searches or detention
- The right not to face discrimination while seeking or maintaining employment due to lack of a permanent mailing address
- The right not to be criminally sanctioned for unobtrusively sleeping in a public place
- The right to emergency medical care
- The right to vote, register to vote and receive documentation needed to prove identity for voting
- The right to protection from disclosure to law enforcement agencies
- The right to confidentiality of personal records and information
- The right to a reasonable expectation of privacy of personal property

The legislation stems from a study by the Senate Committee on Housing & Municipal Government looking to address the homelessness in the state.

Action has been taken by the Office of the Governor to revamp the Interagency Council on Homelessness, as well as to improve conditions at existing shelters.

"The work that has been done by the committee, and today's passage of the 'Homeless Bill of Rights,' are gratifying things," added Senator Tassoni. "But the problem has not been solved."

"We must keep working, and work harder, to move Rhode Islanders off the street and into more permanent, safe housing."

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