

A Homeless Bill of Rights



Homeless Person's Bill of Rights and Fairness Act Introduced to Assembly

CONTACT:

Paul Boden
Western Regional Advocacy Project
(415) 621-2533
pboden@wraphome.org

Carlos Alcalá
Communications Director,
Office of Assemblymember
Tom Ammiano
(916) 319-2017

*(Local contact information can be
inserted here)*

DECEMBER 3, 2012 – Building off of Rhode Island's community effort, a coalition of West Coast organizations is working with Assemblymember Tom Ammiano (D-San Francisco) to introduce a Homeless Persons' Bill of Rights and Fairness Act today.

The bill's author, Assemblymember Tom Ammiano, said, "We need to stop criminalizing the behavior of people who have nowhere else to turn. People who are in need of mental health services or who have lost their jobs and their homes are being told, 'Move along or go to jail.' The Homeless Persons' Bill of Rights begins to give us a framework for appropriate approaches to protecting our communities and those who are vulnerable."

"From the Ugly Laws of the mid-19th century – which made it a crime to have a visible disability in public – through the anti-Okie law of the Great Depression – which made it a crime for poor people to enter the state – up through the present, state and local governments have used unjust laws to punish or conceal poor people," said Paul Boden, Organizing Director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP). "But as long as these laws have existed, there's been resistance. We're introducing this bill of rights because we believe that the time has come to address the wrongs and most importantly stop them from ever happening again."

The effort is a collaboration between WRAP, Jericho: A Voice for Justice, and the Western Center on Law and Poverty. Judith Larson of Jericho said, "This is the essence of what Jericho was formed to do, and has continued to do for the past 25 years."

WRAP has conducted over 800 surveys concerning homeless people's interactions with law enforcement. 82% of survey respondents had been hassled by law enforcement for sleeping. 78% had had interactions with law enforcement simply because they'd been hanging out in a public space. 77% had been harassed by law enforcement for sitting down. Becky Dennison, Co-Director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network, said, "When we've criminalized sleeping, standing, and sitting down, we've basically criminalized a person's existence. A bill like this is long overdue".

The Act would guarantee homeless people freedom from discrimination in law enforcement, employment, housing and shelter, and public benefits. It protects people's right to use public space, to keep personal property, and to engage in life-sustaining activities. It also guarantees people the right to counsel in any case where they're being prosecuted. Paula Lomazzi from Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee said, "These are basic rights that allow all people to stay alive and engage in a democratic society – things most of us get to take for granted, but which remain a daily challenge for many of the poorest members of our communities."

###