



**Massachusetts
APPLESEED** | Center for
Law & Justice

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October 23, 2019

Representative William M. Straus, House Chair and
Senator Joseph A. Boncore, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Transportation
State House, Room 112
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Letter in Support of S.2043/H.3066, *An Act to provide identification to homeless youth and families*

Dear Chairman Straus, Chairman Boncore, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Massachusetts Appleseed respectfully submits the following letter in support of S.2043/H.3066, *An Act to provide identification to homeless youth and families* and requests that the Joint Committee on Transportation give the bill a favorable report.

The mission of the Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice (MA Appleseed) is to promote equal rights and opportunities for Massachusetts residents by developing and advocating for systemic solutions to social justice issues. Appleseed centers across the country work both collectively and independently to build a society in which opportunities are genuine, access to the law is universal and equal, and government advances the public interest.

Central to this mission is ensuring that all residents of Massachusetts, especially children and youth, have access to opportunity and basic necessities such as food and shelter. As a member of the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission, an integral component of this work is promoting policies and programs that support and protect young people experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts. Despite positive efforts by advocates and state government, the growth of homelessness in Massachusetts, which affects over 20,000 Massachusetts residents, remains troubling.¹ Even more concerning is the scale of youth homelessness.² In the 2017-2018 school year, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education estimated that 24,071 of its students experienced homelessness at some point during the school year.³ The severity of youth homelessness is further exacerbated by the fact that many homeless young people are members of vulnerable populations. A survey of homeless young people in Massachusetts last year found that 26% are pregnant or parenting while 23.5% were LGBTQ.⁴ Many homeless young people are also high-school dropouts and/or survivors of abuse.⁵ With these additional burdens, young people experiencing homelessness face serious obstacles to finding safe places to live, accessing social services, and gaining employment.

State agencies' policies often unintentionally block young people experiencing homelessness from accessing social services and finding jobs. Many homeless young people cannot obtain state-issued identification (ID) due to the cost of getting an ID, the lack of a permanent address, and the requirement for parental consent. Having a state-issued ID makes a serious difference in young people's access to services and opportunity. Without proper ID, young people are unable to apply for jobs, access public services, like SNAP benefits, and open bank accounts.⁶ 15.5% of homeless young people surveyed reported being unable to get the help they need due to the lack of ID.⁷

Fortunately, there are simple, common sense policies available to ensure all young people experiencing homelessness have access to IDs. S.2043/H.3066 represents an important opportunity to address this burden faced by homeless young people. This bill would reform the way in which Massachusetts issues IDs to allow homeless young people to access the opportunities and services they deserve. S.2043/H.3066 would modify existing laws to include an exception process that would allow individuals experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied young people who are homeless to both have the Massachusetts identification card fee waived, and use the address of social service providers as proof of residency. A waived fee and proof of residency would ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness have the ability to access social services.

By making it easier for homeless young people to obtain identification, we can ensure that our society's most vulnerable members have greater access help and opportunity. Homeless young people deserve your support in accessing the most basic social institutions of our state.

Massachusetts Appleseed strongly urges you to issue a favorable report for S.2043/H.3066.

Respectfully submitted,



Deborah M. Silva,
Executive Director
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law & Justice

¹ "The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress," The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2018-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

² "Basic Facts on Homelessness and Housing in Massachusetts and Across the Country," Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, <https://www.mahomeless.org/about-us/basic-facts>

³ Homeless youth is defined by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 as a homeless person 24 or younger and not in the "physical care or custody" of a parent or legal guardian.

⁴ Homeless Student Program Data 2017-2018, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mv/2017-18districtdata.html>.

⁵ "Massachusetts Youth Count: 2018," Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, http://www.mahomeless.org/images/2018_finalYouthCountreport.pdf.

⁶ "Homeless and Runaway Youth," NCSL, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/homeless-and-runaway-youth.aspx>.

⁷ Schanes, Christine. "Homeless People Need ID," Huffington Post, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-homeless-people-feel-_b_835216

⁸ "Massachusetts Youth Count: 2018." Unaccompanied and Homeless Youth Commission.