



## The League of Women Voters of Delaware

### **POSITION STATEMENT: We support Adoption of a Homeless Bill of Rights**

The League of Women Voters of Delaware supports adoption of a state Homeless Bill of Rights to protect the rights of our most vulnerable citizens and to counter the inefficiencies and inequities resulting from current laws and practices. The LWVDE position is based on LWVUS policy which supports "...equal access to education, employment and housing and, "...policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family."

According to the Delaware Homeless Planning Council's most recently available annual Point in Time survey there were:

- 677 households composed of 901 individuals who were homeless in Delaware on January 28, 2014. This includes 94 veterans. And approximately 6,000 people will experience homelessness annually in Delaware based on national research projections from the Point in Time survey.

According to the Delaware Housing Coalition's "Who Can Afford to Live in Delaware? 2014" and HPC Delaware's "Ending Discrimination for Delaware's Homeless":

- 26,701 (28%) renter households in Delaware are severely cost-burdened, with housing costs exceeding 50% of their income.
- Delawareans unable to work due to disability often must rely solely on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) of \$721/month to meet their basic needs--including shelter. For those who rely on Supplemental Security Income (SSI), one-bedroom rents in Delaware exceed income by \$618 to \$919; no one in Delaware receiving SSI can afford a one bedroom apartment at fair market value.
- Individuals and families struggling to lift themselves out of homelessness often face practices by potential landlords, employers, service providers, or the police that are discriminatory. This can prevent access to essential services and opportunities for those most in need.

To prevent and end homelessness in Delaware we must ensure those persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness receive equal treatment and have equal access to employment, housing, and shelter. A Homeless Persons' Bill of Rights would guarantee persons experiencing homelessness the same rights and privileges as any other citizen, particularly with regard to equal access to temporary shelter, equal use of public space and treatment by police, and equal access to housing and employment. This must:

- Require that all temporary housing providers in Delaware comply with the American Disabilities Act and the Delaware Fair Housing Act.
- Ensure that persons experiencing homelessness in the state enjoy the same rights as other citizens.
- Eliminate the intentional and discriminatory targeting of homeless individuals by police officers for being present in public spaces, performing legal and life sustaining activities in public spaces, or violating nuisance laws.
- Mandate housing providers and employers to treat all applicants equally, regardless of their housing status or sources of income
- Pursue alternative justice system strategies to criminalization.
- **In addition, a Homeless Bill of Rights must insure that our Voting laws make it legal and feasible for homeless persons to exercise their right to vote.**