

January 25, 2024

Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
Sen. Walter Timilty, Chair
Rep. Carlos González, Chair
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Support H.2326/S.1506 “An Act relative to successful transition and re-entry to tomorrow for incarcerated persons” (The STARTT Act)

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, are writing to express our collective support for H.2326/S.1506 to ensure the Department of Correction (DOC) provides state issued photo identification cards to returning citizens. We believe that this legislation is a crucial step towards promoting rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

Access to a Massachusetts state I.D. card is fundamental in assisting returning citizens as they navigate various aspects of life post-incarceration, including securing employment, housing, and accessing essential services. The lack of identification often presents significant barriers, hindering individuals from fully participating in their communities and rebuilding their lives.

Governor Healey has recognized the critical role that valid identification plays in facilitating successful reintegration into society. Last March, the administration announced a new Memorandum of Understanding between the DOC and Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) attempting to streamline the process through executive action. We applaud the efforts of the administration, but statutory barriers still prevent the new process from achieving its desired results.

Legislation is needed to enable returning citizens experiencing homelessness to receive an accommodation regarding the RMV’s strict address requirements. Even with the DOC doing their part in getting the necessary documents to prove identity, if an individual cannot prove they are returning to a valid address, the RMV will not issue an identification card. This bill recognizes and fixes this problem by temporarily allowing alternative addresses, such as an adult family member’s home, a temporary group residence, a place of worship, a community center, a non-profit organization, or a city or town hall in the municipality where the person plans to reside -- for the limited purpose of obtaining a state I.D. card upon release from incarceration.

Ensuring that returning citizens have access to state I.D. cards upon release addresses a key obstacle to reintegrating into society. This is not only a matter of practicality but also a demonstration of our commitment to fostering a fair and equitable society for all.

We urge you to consider the positive impact the STARTT Act, H.2326/S.1506, can have on the lives of returning citizens and the communities they reintegrate into.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to your support in championing this legislation.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Massachusetts

Black and Pink Massachusetts

Boston Immigrant Justice Accompaniment Network

Committee for Public Counsel Services

Community Reentry Program Inc.

Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action

Justice 4 Housing

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery

Middlesex Human Service Agency

National Consumer Law Center

New Beginnings Reentry Services, Inc.

Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts

Prison Policy Initiative

Recovery Homes Collaborative

Roca, Inc.

Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network