

Emerging issue: Hiring bias against homeless

Employers in three states—Connecticut, Illinois and Rhode Island—must comply with what may be the nation’s most unique employment-related laws. Each of those states has a “Homeless Bill of Rights” that bans employment discrimination against homeless people. Employers cannot discriminate in hiring against people because they lack a permanent mailing address, or because their address is a homeless shelter.

As we’ve seen with many discrimination bills—such as unemployment discrimination—these ideas can quickly hop from state to state. A similar homeless-bias bill has been introduced in the California Legislature, and several municipalities have their own ordinances.

While some applicants may leave their address off their résumés because they are homeless, an increasing number actually do so for other reasons:

- 1. Fear of disqualification based on location.** Some employers admit they prefer local candidates because they worry that employees with long commutes will have attendance problems. Keep in mind that the applicant may be willing to relocate or could thrive despite long commutes.
- 2. Fear of bias based on location.** Applicants may fear that stereotypes about low-income or predominantly minority neighborhoods could hurt their chances of being called.
- 3. Identity theft/privacy concerns.** Some may be trying to limit the amount of personal information they give out.