



## North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care Client Bill of Rights

### Introduction

The NC Balance of State CoC (NC BoS CoC) provides a system of coordination and governance for services provided to people experiencing homelessness across a 79-county area of North Carolina. A Steering Committee serves as the NC BoS CoC's governing body with several subcommittees, including the Lived Expertise Advisory Council (LEAC), supporting the CoC's governance work. The CoC formed the LEAC, a group composed entirely of people who have experienced homelessness, in 2021 with a commitment to ensure that people who have experienced homelessness are integrated in all aspects of the CoC's decision-making process.

The LEAC drafted and the Steering Committee approved this Client Bill of Rights to ensure the NC Balance of State CoC sets clear guidance and expectations for CoC stakeholders and providers on the treatment of clients. The following policy applies to all agencies and programs providing services to people experiencing homelessness within the 79 county area of the NC BoS CoC. All agencies in the CoC must uphold the rights set forth in this document. This Client Bill of Rights is founded on the idea that homelessness is not a personal choice or indicative of personal flaws, but that the experience of homelessness is a crisis that people may go through, and the role of service providers should be to assist in ending that crisis as quickly as possible with the greatest amount of respect and humility as possible.

### Statement of Rights

Any person receiving services or engaging with a program serving people experiencing homelessness in the NC Balance of State CoC has the right to:

- Respect and dignity
- Services free of discrimination
- Self determination
- Safety
- Privacy
- Inclusion and participation in decisions about their welfare
- Transparency in agency policies that affect the services they receive

### Principle of Housing First

The NC BoS CoC values and defends the principle of Housing First, believing that housing is a human right and any assistance in regaining housing should be offered without any preconditions of income, sobriety, family status, health, or participation in services.



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## Equity Statement

The CoC understands that the founders of the United States of America built the country on a system of slavery, genocide, and oppression of people who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Women and people identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ+) have been denied the privileges and opportunities for self-determination that have been afforded to cisgender men due to misogyny and patriarchy throughout the country's history. This legacy of oppression continues and lives on through systems that disproportionately impact BIPOC communities, women, and LGBTQ+ peoples, and people living with visible and invisible disabilities. The NC Balance of State CoC envisions a coordinated system of services that provides a way out of homelessness for everyone in a way that celebrates differences and recognizes that different people have unique needs and strengths.

## Grievance Process

If any client believes that their rights have been violated by a service provider within the NC BoS CoC, they may be able to file a grievance against that agency in accordance with the NC Balance of State CoC Code of Conduct (appendix 6 of the NC Balance of State CoC Governance Charter, <https://www.ncceh.org/files/12692/>).

- The Code of Conduct, and adjacent Grievances Policy are primarily enforceable within agencies that receive public funding within the NC Balance of State CoC. Agencies that do not receive Emergency Solutions Grant or Continuum of Care grant funding but operate within the geographical boundaries of the NC Balance of State CoC may choose not to participate in this Code of Conduct policy.
- The Steering Committee reserves the right to act against agencies that are not publicly funded and will consider all grievances filed, without regard to the provider funding source.
- Any person filing a grievance based on a violation of the Client Bill of Rights must first attempt to resolve that grievance within the agency in question. Each agency should have their own established grievance policy.
- If a person has completed the grievance policy within the agency and not satisfied with the result, they have the right to file a grievance with the CoC. For assistance in determining which grievance option might apply to you, you may email NCCHEH staff at [bos@ncceh.org](mailto:bos@ncceh.org) or call 919-755-4393.

## Detail of Stated Rights for Persons Experiencing Homelessness

This Client Bill of Rights asserts that, as someone seeking services based on an experience of homelessness, you are entitled to the following rights regarding your treatment:

**Respect and Dignity:** When receiving services related to your experience of homelessness, you have the right to be approached as an individual with your own unique experiences, strengths, and needs. You have the right to be treated with respect and the responsibility to treat others with respect. You should not feel threatened, coerced, or bullied by anyone providing services to you. You should not feel judged or denied services based on your clothing, appearance, or any other factor outside of eligibility criteria.



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**Services Free of Discrimination:** You have the right to not experience discrimination based on your race, ethnicity, color, national origin, language, ancestry, religion, sex, familial status, age, gender identity, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, etc) status, marital status, domestic or sexual violence victim status, or sensory, mental, or physical disability. You have the right not to be discriminated against based on your clothing or appearance. You have the right to decide for yourself who is a member of your family. You have a right to access a shelter bed that aligns with your gender identity, regardless of your sex-assigned-at-birth or what's on your ID. You have the right to be seen and celebrated with all the identities you might carry.

**Self Determination:** You have the right to make choices about your welfare, your needs, and your future. You have the freedom to choose whether to participate in services offered by the program you are working with, such as classes, treatment, or case management. The ultimate decision about what services you participate in is your own and, outside of rules and expectations explicitly stated at shelter entry, you should not be denied shelter or housing support based on your refusal to participate services such as life skills classes, addiction treatment, employment search, etc. You have the right to participate in the level of services that meet your needs and to identify those specific needs. You have the right to control or deny the release of, and access to, your personal information.

**Safety:** You have the right to not be physically, sexually, verbally and/or emotionally abused, harassed, or threatened. While a risk of danger cannot always be preempted, you have the right to have any concerns about safety or privacy taken seriously and for the service provider to take reasonable steps to address your concerns.

**Privacy:** You have the right to expect that your personal information will be kept private and will only be shared on a need-to-know basis after consent through a release of information. You have the right to be informed about what circumstances would result in your information being shared without your consent. You have the right to control or deny the release of, and access to, your personal information at any time.

**Inclusion and Participation in Decisions about your Welfare:** You have the best knowledge and understanding of your needs. You have the right to make choices about what services and housing options are the best fit for you. Service providers should present all relevant information and options for your case, allowing you to make the final decision, without coercion, about which services and referrals you will utilize.

**Transparency in Agency Policies that Affect the Services you Receive:** You have a right to receive a copy of the agency policies that govern the services you receive, including all rules or responsibilities that you might have to maintain your stay or participation in the program. You have a right to know all the services available and to receive support in choosing the best options for you. If you are being dismissed from a program, you have the right to receive a written description clearly stating the reason for the actions being taken and to appeal any decision to terminate services. Services providers should present their appeal process in writing to you upon entry into any program.