

Please Sign & Return

A petition to give clergy free hospital parking in Massachusetts

RETURN SIGNED SHEETS BY
OCTOBER 4, 2026

Clergy are called to hospitals at all hours — including the middle of the night — to pray with families and administer last rites. Yet most Massachusetts hospitals charge them to park, and no law protects them. This petition asks our state legislators to require hospitals to provide free, easy parking to clergy visiting a patient. Please add your name.

How to help — three steps

1. **Read the one-page fact sheet** (next page) so you know exactly what you're signing.
2. **Make copies, then sign.** First, photocopy the blank petition form so everyone in your congregation can sign too. Then each signer prints their name, Massachusetts town and ZIP, and signs and dates. Massachusetts residents only.
3. **Mail it back** in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope, postmarked by October 4, 2026, to:

Timothy Koehn, PO Box 149, Marblehead, MA 01945

Questions? Contact Timothy Koehn at tjkoehn01@gmail.com.

Thank you for helping make sure no minister has to pay to sit with the sick and dying.

Free Parking for Visiting Clergy — Fact Sheet

What would the bill do?

It would require every Massachusetts hospital that charges for parking to provide free, validated parking to ordained clergy of any faith who are visiting a patient to give pastoral care — and to make that free parking easy to get, at any hour, right at the exit.

Why is it needed?

Clergy are called to hospitals at all hours — including the middle of the night for last rites. A few Boston hospitals advertise a “clergy courtesy” online but make it hard to use in practice, and most publish no policy at all. No Massachusetts law protects clergy today, so they routinely pay to minister to the sick and dying.

Who qualifies?

Ordained clergy of any religious tradition — priests, ministers, pastors, rabbis, cantors, imams, and others — who are visiting a patient. Proof is intentionally simple and broad: a clergy ID, an ordination certificate or its equivalent (including semichah for rabbis), or a letter from a congregation.

Doesn't this favor religion?

No. It applies equally to clergy of every faith and is tied to caring for a hospitalized patient — a patient's access to spiritual support — not to any personal benefit. It treats all traditions the same.

What does it cost hospitals?

Very little. Clergy pastoral visits are a small share of parking traffic, and many hospitals already claim to offer this voluntarily. The bill mainly stops hospitals from charging — or quietly obstructing — what they say they already provide.

What does it NOT do?

It does not give clergy free parking for their own medical appointments or personal errands, and it is not a general free-parking law. It is limited to visiting a patient for pastoral care.

How can I help?

Sign the petition form, and invite others in your congregation to sign it too. Then mail the completed sheets to Timothy Koehn, PO Box 149, Marblehead, MA 01945, postmarked by October 4, 2026. All signatures will be gathered and delivered to the state legislators together — you don't need to contact anyone else.

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

In the General Court

By request of Timothy Koehn, a resident of Marblehead, a petition (accompanied by bill) for legislation to provide free parking to clergy visiting hospital patients. [Committee to be assigned by the Clerk.]

An Act relative to parking access for clergy providing pastoral care to hospital patients.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. Chapter 111 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after section 51J the following section:—

Section 51K. Free parking for visiting clergy providing pastoral care.

(a) Definitions. As used in this section, the following words shall have the following meanings:—

“Department”, the department of public health.

“Hospital”, any institution licensed by the department under section 51 that charges a fee for patient or visitor parking.

“Pastoral care”, spiritual, religious, or emotional support provided to a patient, or to a patient’s family, by visiting clergy, including but not limited to prayer, counsel, sacraments, and rites such as the administration of last rites or comparable end-of-life or emergency observances.

“Visiting clergy”, an ordained, commissioned, or comparably authorized member of the clergy of any religious tradition — including, without limitation, priests, ministers, pastors, deacons, rabbis, cantors, imams, and other recognized religious leaders — who attends a patient at a hospital to provide pastoral care.

(b) Proof of status; broad construction. A hospital shall recognize as visiting clergy any person who presents any one of the following: (i) a clergy identification card; (ii) a certificate or letter of ordination, commissioning, or authorization, or its equivalent within the person’s tradition, including semichah for rabbis; or (iii) a letter from a congregation, religious body, or religious employer attesting to the person’s clergy status. This subsection shall be construed broadly and inclusively in favor of recognizing clergy status. A hospital shall not require documentation beyond that described in this subsection, shall not require advance registration, and shall neither favor nor disfavor any religion or denomination.

(c) Free parking required. A hospital shall not charge, and shall validate or waive in full, the cost of parking for visiting clergy for the duration of a visit made to provide pastoral care to a patient.

(d) Availability and convenience; no obstruction. The waiver or validation required by subsection (c) shall be: (1) available at all times the hospital admits patients or permits visitors, including nights, weekends, and holidays; (2) obtainable at the point of exit — including at any staffed booth, cashier, security desk, or automated payment station serving the parking facility — without requiring the clergy member to travel to a separate office or

building, to pre-register, or to interrupt or delay a pastoral visit; and (3) provided without undue delay or condition. A hospital shall not adopt, maintain, or enforce any policy, practice, fee structure, staffing pattern, or physical arrangement designed or reasonably likely to discourage, obstruct, or frustrate visiting clergy from obtaining free parking under this section.

(e) Notice. Each hospital shall: (1) publish, in a clear and conspicuous place on its public website and at each parking facility it operates, the process by which visiting clergy obtain free parking under this section; and (2) upon a person identifying themselves as visiting clergy, promptly inform that person of the process and that no payment is required.

(f) Enforcement. The department shall enforce this section as a condition of hospital licensure. The department may investigate complaints and may assess a civil penalty of not more than \$500 for each violation; a pattern of violations shall be grounds for action against the hospital's license. Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit any other remedy available at law.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect on January 1, 2027.

Drafting note (not part of the bill): The section number (51K), the effective date, and the \$500 penalty are the petitioner's suggestions and may be finalized by the Legislature's counsel.

PETITION IN SUPPORT OF

An Act relative to parking access for clergy providing pastoral care to hospital patients

We, the undersigned residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, urge the General Court to enact the above bill, which would require Massachusetts hospitals that charge for parking to provide free, easily obtained parking to ordained clergy of any faith who visit patients to provide spiritual care — including emergency and overnight visits. We ask our legislators, including Rep. Jennifer Balinsky Armini and Sen. Brendan P. Crighton, to file, support, and advance this bill.

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When this sheet is full (or by October 4, 2026), please mail it back — in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope — to:

Timothy Koehn • PO Box 149, Marblehead, MA 01945

Please mail so it is postmarked by October 4, 2026. Completed sheets are delivered together to state legislators.

Please print clearly. Massachusetts residents only.

Circulated by (congregation / organization): _____

Contact (name & phone or email): _____

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