

Clothing is an Essential Need: A Call to Action for State Legislators

Clothing is a fundamental human necessity, yet it remains overlooked in policies defining essential needs. For low-income individuals, families, and those experiencing homelessness, access to appropriate clothing is crucial for dignity, health, employment opportunities, and social inclusion.

Despite its importance, clothing is not currently classified as an essential good, leaving organizations like Project Ropa to rely on private donations and limited resources despite the onslaught of requests for help we field daily. We urge state legislators to 1) recognize clothing as an essential good, ensuring that government funding and support are extended to organizations providing clothing assistance, and 2) to take action by creating laws that formally classify clothing as essential, particularly for those facing economic hardship and adversity.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Clothing

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs outlines the fundamental levels of human needs, with basic physiological needs like food, water, shelter, and clothing forming the foundation. Until these needs are met, individuals cannot progress to higher levels of security, relationships, or self-actualization. Clothing is vital in this foundation, offering protection from the elements, ensuring personal hygiene, and providing a sense of identity and self-worth.

For individuals experiencing homelessness or those in poverty, clothing is not just a matter of comfort; it is integral to survival. Without access to appropriate clothing, individuals face exposure to extreme weather, difficulty securing employment, and social stigma that deepens their sense of isolation. Ensuring that clothing is recognized as an essential good can help address these barriers and contribute to the well-being of vulnerable populations.

The Role of Project Ropa

Founded in 2016 by Caitlin Adler, Project Ropa is a nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles dedicated to reducing textile waste while restoring dignity to those in need by providing clothing and hygiene essentials. We offer a comprehensive range of clothing, shoes, accessories, and hygiene products to individuals experiencing poverty and homelessness and operate the only mobile clothing closet of its kind in Los Angeles. Our services reach underserved communities, partnering with other local organizations and businesses to distribute surplus materials that would otherwise end up in landfills.

Our Reach and the Growing Need

Project Ropa currently has a waitlist of over 75 local organizations requesting our clothing services. Many of these organizations receive significant government funding, but due to the lack of formal classification of clothing as an essential good, we are not eligible for this support. The limitations of our resources hinder our efforts, and without classification as an essential good, we cannot meet the surging demand for these critical supplies.



The need for clothing is year-round, especially for those struggling with poverty and homelessness. By providing free clothing and hygiene products, we help individuals meet their basic needs and restore a sense of dignity they may have lost through their struggles.

The Impact of Classification

Classifying clothing as an essential good can significantly impact individuals, families, and communities. For nonprofit organizations like ours, it would open up opportunities for funding through government programs, allowing us to expand our services and meet the ever-growing demand. This would enable us to provide more comprehensive support to those who need it most without being constrained by the limitations of donations and volunteer efforts.

Additionally, recognizing clothing as essential would underscore its importance in the public eye, making it a priority for policymakers and encouraging greater collaboration between public and private sectors. It would signal a commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind simply because they cannot afford the basics.

Call to Action

We urge state legislators to support the creation of a law that classifies clothing as an essential good. Doing so would not only empower organizations like Project Ropa to do more for those in need, but it would also be a step toward fulfilling the fundamental rights of every person, ensuring that they have access to the resources necessary for survival and dignity. By acknowledging the critical role of clothing in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we can foster a society where all individuals, regardless of their economic circumstances, have the opportunity to thrive.

Conclusion

The need for clothing is undeniable, particularly among homeless and low-income individuals. As an essential component of basic human survival and dignity, it is time that we recognize clothing as an essential good in our laws. By supporting this important change, state legislators have the opportunity to create lasting change and provide tangible support to our most vulnerable populations. Project Ropa is committed to continuing this work, but we need your help to ensure that the essential nature of clothing is acknowledged and supported through law.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

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Project Ropa is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization on a mission to reduce textile waste, restore dignity and empower lives by providing clothing and hygiene essentials to those in need, while also advocating for clothing to be recognized as an essential human need.

