

# NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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## Changing Laws, Changing Lives

Aleah Green's son, Shiloh, was denied enrollment in school because he and his mother were homeless. When Aleah contacted the Law Center, we helped her challenge the school's decision under the McKinney-Vento Act. Shiloh was enrolled in kindergarten within one week.

**The law was there to protect Shiloh, and our attorneys helped to enforce and uphold it.** But in many cases the law does not protect people who are homeless or at risk. The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty uses the power of the law to improve the lives of homeless people—by upholding laws already on the books, by advocating for new laws, and by educating people about their rights.

Aleah and Shiloh's experience is all too common. During the 2013-14 school year, the most recent year for which data is available, 1,360,747 school children in America were homeless, an almost 90% increase since the recession began. Each year, more than 3.5 million people spend time living on the streets or in shelters. And, over 7 million more are doubled up—with no home of their own—due to economic hardship.

**The Law Center is the only national organization dedicated solely to using the power of the law** to prevent and end homelessness in America. With the support of a large network of pro bono lawyers, we use the power of the law to meet the immediate and long-term needs of those who are homeless or at-risk. In partnership with state and local advocates across the country, we work to strengthen the social safety net through advocacy, training, public education and impact litigation.

## Meeting Needs

The Law Center makes a crucial difference in the lives of millions of homeless men, women, children and families across the country. Our programs:

- Ensure that homeless children are able to go to school
- Prevent domestic violence survivors from becoming homeless
- Protect the rights of tenants in foreclosed properties, to prevent their homelessness
- Fight discrimination against homeless people based on their status
- Create homes and communities for homeless people with unused government property
- Hold our government accountable to its obligation to ensure the human right to housing

The Law Center partners with major law firms to enforce the rights and improve the lives of homeless and poor Americans. **In 2015, we leveraged over \$3 million in pro bono legal support.**

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## Recent Accomplishments

- **Protecting the right to vote.** Wisconsin's Voter ID Law is still being challenged in court by the Law Center and the ALCU in the *Frank v. Walker* case. This year, a federal trial court ruled that voters who have trouble obtaining identification under Wisconsin's voter ID law can still vote.
- **Preventing homelessness for survivors of domestic violence.** The Department of Housing and Urban Development issued a *Final Rule for the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act 2013*. Millions of domestic violence survivors—primarily women and their children—will be protected by the housing provisions we helped win.
- **Protecting homeless children's education rights.** Homeless children have a legal right to stay in their school—but that right is often violated. Through our innovative *Project LEARN*, we uphold and protect homeless kids' education rights—and reform systemic problems so that these kids can have the tools they need to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty. **We won major improvements to the education rights of homeless children as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Education Program ("McKinney-Vento"),** and subsequent agency guidance. We also held trainings and issued new education reports, including our *No Barriers Report*, updated to address the new (ESSA) guidelines.
- **Protecting homeless persons' civil rights.** We stand up for the basic dignity and rights of homeless and poor people by challenging unconscionable city laws and policies. Our 2016 *Housing Not Handcuffs Report* was released showing that the criminalization of homelessness has been on the rise; citing data collected over the last 10 years from 187 cities nationwide. Key findings show city wide bans on loitering, loafing, and vagrancy have increased by 88% and bans on living in vehicles has increased by 143%. The Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign was launched publically in November 2016 and introduced model polices that, if enacted at the federal, state, and local level, would significantly reduce homelessness, cost-effectively.

**Major current institutional funders include:** Bank of America Foundation, Deer Creek Foundation, Ford Foundation, Oak Foundation, Oakwood Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

**Lawyers' Executive Advisory Partners (LEAP)** is a national legal community philanthropic initiative. LEAP members provide financial support and *pro bono* services to further the Law Center's programs. Author **John Grisham** serves as Honorary Chair.

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