

IN JUST TIMES

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NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws,
Changing Lives

News and Commentary for
May 2013

Last year, the number of homeless students topped one million.

This graduation season, help us make sure all our children have a chance for a better future.

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Dear Friends,

A congressional briefing held May 22, *Homelessness in America: Experiences and Solutions*, attracted an overflow crowd of Hill staffers and advocates. For me, it was a bright spot in an otherwise gloomy landscape in Washington, DC.

I was inspired by the co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Homelessness, which sponsored the event, Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson and Rep. Alcee Hastings, together with Senator Patty Murray; by their dedicated staffs; by my fellow panelists; and by the members of the Homeless Advocates Group that supported the event and developed the united policy proposals that I presented.



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

Devin Johnson, a high school senior in Prince George's County who was homeless with his family for four years, detailed the physical hardship he experienced living in a tent in the woods, his shame and efforts to hide his circumstances from his classmates, his efforts to protect his little sister, his pride in his upcoming graduation on the honor roll and plans to join the Navy, and his hopes of a better future.

To keep reading, please [click here](#).

The Right to Adequate Housing in the U.S. - Symposium Report

On April 26, 2013 a packed room of close to 150 attorneys, advocates, and federal, state, and local government officials gathered in New York City for a national symposium on Bringing Economic & Social Rights Home: The Right to Adequate Housing in the U.S. Co-sponsored by the [Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute \(HRI\)](#), the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty \(NLCHP\)](#), and the [Northeastern Law School Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy \(PHRGE\)](#), and hosted at [Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom](#), the symposium connected participants to advanced legal analysis and practice from the U.S. and abroad to aid the housing rights movements' ability to advocate on behalf of homeless and poor Americans.



The participants, co-sponsors, and speakers represented over 80 organizations from 15 states, including federal, state, and local government agencies and the judiciary. An upcoming report by the Law Center summarizes the day's activities, outcomes and next steps where participants can continue to work together. Some of those outcomes include: a CD, distributed at the symposium, containing hundreds of right to housing articles, manuals, and other resources; a planned symposium edition of the Columbia Human Right Law Review; deeper connections to local and national networks for human rights; and a strengthened sense of solidarity amongst the participants that they are part of a truly national, and international, movement for the human right to housing. Links to resources from the conference are collected at the end of the report.

[Click here](#) to read an excerpt of the forthcoming report.

[Jeremy Rosen Featured on 'Melissa Harris-Perry Show'](#)

On Sunday, May 12, MSNBC's [Melissa Harris-Perry Show](#) dedicated both hours of the program to exploring whether poverty in America can be solved. The Tulane professor of political science and political commentator asks, 'What are our nation's creative, humane, enduring solutions to poverty? Seriously, what are they?'

NLCHP's policy director, Jeremy Rosen, was one of several guests invited to discuss real solutions to poverty, hunger, homelessness.



Melissa Harris-Perry, Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed, the Executive Director of the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center James Perry, formerly homeless mother Tiana Gaines-Turner, and our own Jeremy Rosen discussed the implications of the housing market's roaring return for people experiencing homelessness. [Jeremy reminded the audience](#) that homelessness is a housing issue, and without structural and policy investments toward affordable housing, the housing market's return will not mean a reduction in rates of homelessness.

[Click here](#) to keep reading and watch clips the show.

Criminalization of Begging Continues, But Recent Case Law Supports Constitutional Objections

With the economic crisis driving severe increases in street homelessness in recent years, cities across the country have enacted laws restricting begging. Designed to drive homeless and poor persons out of public spaces, especially downtown and tourist areas, these laws frequently violate homeless persons' civil rights, are costly to enforce, and do nothing to address the root causes of homelessness and poverty.



Despite this, more and more cities are adopting this approach. The city of Worcester, near Boston, [enacted two such laws](#) in January, including a "Pedestrian Safety Ordinance" that makes it illegal to stand on a median or step into the street to solicit money, and similar legislation has [was proposed](#) this winter in Baltimore by Councilwoman Rochelle Spector. In March, Ocala, Florida [passed a sweeping ban](#) on "activities in the public rights of way along all major county roads" - a purposely broad definition meant to make the measure able to hold up against a court challenge.

But while these laws continue to proliferate, courts in a number of states have validated the concerns raised by the Law Center.

[Click here](#) to keep reading, including the New York Times' coverage of the Law Center's position.

photo credit: Matthew Staver for the New York Times

Law Center Partners with ABA To Support Human Rights and Protect Disaster Victims

Law Center staff are working with the American Bar Association's Commission on Homelessness & Poverty on two exciting projects - drafting an ABA policy resolution in support of the implementation of the human right to housing and disseminating important information about post-disaster recovery efforts.

Beginning last fall, Law Center Policy Director Jeremy Rosen and Human Rights Program Director Eric Tars worked with the Commission to draft an ABA policy resolution on the right to housing. The Commission finalized the language for the resolution in early May, and it will be considered by the ABA House of Delegates at the organization's annual meeting in August. If the resolution becomes official ABA policy, it will enable the ABA to lobby in support of additional solutions to homelessness, and will serve as a model for state and local governments looking for



Eric Tars at the Right to Adequate Housing in the U.S. Symposium

reassurance that supporting implementation of the human right to housing is in the political mainstream.

Commission Staff Director Amy Horton-Newell called the Law Center's contribution to the resolution integral, saying "The Commission is pleased to be able to help advance the human right to housing here at home.

Without hearing from Eric Tars, with his wealth of experience focusing on domestic implementation of international human rights obligations, we would not have

fully understood the important role lawyers can play in advancing the human right to housing."

The Law Center also partnered with the ABA on a recent forum, held in New York City, to examine remaining post-disaster community legal needs after last fall's Hurricane Sandy. Policy Director Jeremy Rosen helped to plan the meeting and also served as an attendee, providing lessons learned from advocacy after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita along with information about how lawyers can help enforce the educational rights of homeless children and youth after a disaster. Horton-Newell of the ABA said, "The Law Center played a critical role in coordinating the Forum. Jeremy Rosen helped us to bring key advocates to the table, and was able to contribute comments based on his previous advocacy on behalf of disaster victims. We were thrilled to circulate the Law Center's recent disaster advocacy manual, to assist legal aid attorneys and other advocates in their efforts to ensure that children displaced by disasters are able to enroll and attend school."



Changing Laws. Changing Lives.

The Law Center is the only national legal advocacy organization dedicated to ending and preventing homelessness in America. It fights in the halls of power for laws and policies that protect homeless people's rights and help them rise out of poverty.

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