

IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

**NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY**



*Changing Laws,
Changing Lives*

News and Commentary for
November 2013

November is National Homeless Awareness Month



There are homeless students, veterans, families, and communities who need our help. [Help us](#) use the power of the law to advocate for homeless families and individuals; ensure homeless children have access to school; and protect the human and civil rights of homeless persons.

Our McKinney-Vento Awards event was extremely successful. Thank you to all of our supporters, advocates,

Dear Friends,

Late last month we held the 15th annual McKinney-Vento Awards, honoring advocacy to end and prevent homelessness while also looking ahead at the work that remains to be done. It was an [inspiring evening](#).

We celebrated the success of our advocacy to prevent homelessness for



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

honorees, and guests for helping us raise nearly \$250,000!

Check out our event's [LegalBisNow Feature](#)

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domestic violence survivors-primarily women and their children-with the enactment earlier this year of strong housing protections in the [Violence Against Women Act](#), covering over 4 million new households. We were proud to honor [Senator Al Franken](#) and [Congresswoman Gwen Moore](#) for their leadership in Congress, and we are grateful for their partnership with us.

We were proud to honor the dedication and commitment of Akin Gump, and their [successful pro bono work with us](#) to challenge restrictions imposed by the City of Dallas on groups providing food to poor and homeless people in public places. In doing this work the firm truly represents the best in the legal profession, and we are grateful for [its partnership](#) as well.

And we were proud to honor [Judy Curtis](#), a tenant who fought back against eviction when her building was entering foreclosure. Along with our friends at the Public Justice Center, we supported her successful fight to claim her rights under the [Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act](#)-ground breaking federal legislation that the Law Center helped to get enacted.

But even as we celebrate these successes, we are mindful that much remains to be done. Indeed, as foreclosures and unemployment continue, the numbers of Americans who are homeless or at risk continues to grow. As we take time to honor our victories, we also gather strength and build our resolve to forge ahead.

We have the tools to end and prevent homelessness in America, and we know how to do it. What's missing is the political will to put solutions-at sufficient scale--in place. For our part we will keep fighting until we reach our goal. We are grateful that unprecedented support for this year's McKinney-Vento Awards helped us raise critical funds to continue our work, and hope you will continue to [support us](#).

McKinney-Vento Awards Event Recap



[Left to Right] Senator Al Franken, Maria Foscarinis, G.W. Rolle, and Ed McNicholas

This year's McKinney-Vento Awards event was our most successful ever, raising nearly \$250,000 toward our work on behalf of homeless and vulnerable Americans.

Featured in [LegalBisNow](#), our annual McKinney-Vento Awards successfully provided an opportunity to reflect on our accomplishments with our many allies-in the legislature, in private industry, and in the legal community-who are committed to addressing poverty and ensuring justice.

Memorable remarks include [Senator Franken's](#), who stated, "I am honored to accept the Stewart B. McKinney Award, and I'm proud to say that women can no longer be evicted from federally supported homes when they're at their most vulnerable." [Congresswoman Gwen Moore](#) emphasized in her remarks that it is thanks to advocates such as the Law Center, that there are effective laws on the books to help eliminate poverty. As Akin Gump honoree [Steve Schulman](#) noted, the Law Center leverages millions of dollars in first-rate, *pro bono* legal advocacy on behalf of people, such as honoree [Judy Curtis](#), who would otherwise go unheard.

Although there is so much more to do, we are grateful to our supporters, advocates, honorees, and readers for your dedication to ending homelessness.

We also extend a huge thank you to our Event Sponsor, [Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP](#)

Akin Gump

STRAUSS HAUER & FELD LLP

The Law Center's Lawsuit to Protect Voting Rights in Wisconsin

The Law Center's [litigation over the Wisconsin voter ID law](#) went to trial in early November, in the US District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, located in Milwaukee. The Law Center is co-counseling the case with the [ACLU of Wisconsin](#), the [ACLU Voting Rights Project](#) and [Dechert LLP](#).



Photo by PRX

We became involved in the case to protect the voting rights of homeless people, who are unduly burdened by Wisconsin's strict voter ID law that requires a photo ID from all in person voters, without exception. While the law required the state to provide free ID cards, homeless people often lack the documents necessary to obtain the ID, such as a birth certificate - and must therefore pay to obtain them, meaning that the ID is not free at all.

Law Center Policy Director Jeremy Rosen attended the first week of the trial, and observed the dramatic testimony of voters who struggled to obtain ID, including Carl Ellis, a homeless veteran who had to walk 40 minutes each way to DMV, only to be denied ID because his documentation was not in order, or Eddie Lee Holloway, whose birth certificate was printed with a typo and thus could not get ID without paying \$500 to amend the birth certificate. When asked if he could afford that, Mr. Brown, who is homeless, said "I don't have 500 cents right now." And then there was Shirley Brown, born by midwife in segregated Louisiana in the 1930's, who never had a birth certificate and has lived and voted just fine without one until the voter ID law passed.

"This is absurd," said Rosen. "We have plaintiffs in this case who have voted for 30, 40, 50 years - and now they can't do it any more, all because the State of Wisconsin alleges that people might (not even that they do) commit voter fraud by impersonating a registered voter at the polls. Wisconsin voters deserve better, as do voters in other states with these unnecessary laws, and we're fighting hard to make sure these laws are overturned."

The Law Center in Geneva

The Law Center's Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy Legal Fellow, Kirsten Blume, spent a week in Geneva last month advocating to various UN Human Rights officials regarding the issue of U.S. criminalization of homelessness. The U.S. government shutdown led to a

postponement of the U.S. hearing before the UN Human Rights Committee this October but that did not stop Kirsten from traveling to Geneva for scheduled meetings and impromptu discussions with UN Human Rights Committee Members, Special Rapporteurs, and Human Rights Officers.



UN Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations

The trip provided the chance to discuss how the Law Center can collaborate with various UN mandates, such as the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty, to combat the domestic and international trend to criminalize the basic human needs of homeless individuals. Kirsten shared that, "it was an incredible experience to learn about the mechanisms of international law that can be utilized for domestic advocacy and a humbling privilege to advocate to UN officials regarding the human rights of the millions of people facing poverty and homelessness in the U.S."



Kirsten at UN Palais des Nations

To learn more about Kirsten's time in Geneva and the issue of criminalization, check out the Law Center's [blog](#) and the Law Center's shadow report to the Human Rights Committee called, [Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading](#). The U.S. hearings have been re-scheduled for March, 2014 in Geneva. Kirsten's trip laid a foundation to discuss U.S. criminalization of homelessness as it violates the international law when the UN Human Rights Committee convenes next spring.

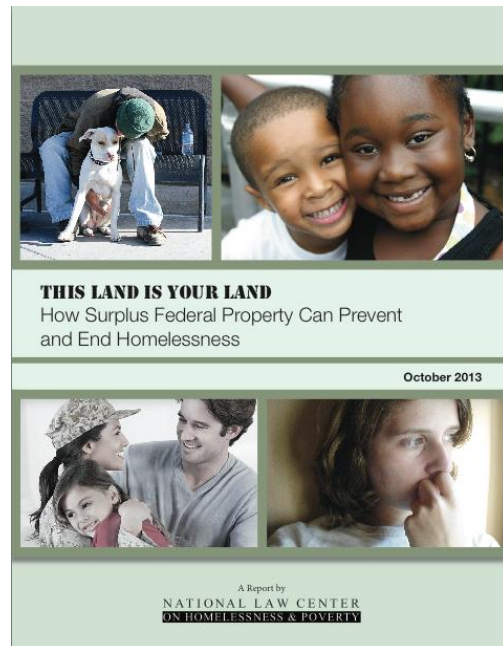
New Law Center Report: This Land is Your Land

The Law Center released [This Land is Your Land: How Surplus Property Can Prevent and End Homelessness](#), a report on Title V of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This is the third report by the Law Center on the Title V program, which allows vacant federal property to be used, for free, by eligible groups who provide housing or services to homeless persons.

The increase in homelessness stemming from the foreclosure crisis and prolonged unemployment has overwhelmed already overburdened homeless service providers. In the current environment, the Law Center explains why it is imperative that the federal government eliminates waste and maximizes available resources to help the millions of Americans suffering in the economic crisis. Protecting and expanding the ability of homeless service providers to access unused federal property is a critical part of that effort.

Criminalization of Homelessness in Europe

The Federation of European of National organizations working with the Homeless, has released its first ever [report on the criminalization of homelessness in Europe](#). Noting that the report was "inspired" by the Law Center's longstanding work on this issue, the new report cites our work extensively. While we are certainly not pleased at the growth of criminalization in Europe, we are glad that our friends at FEANTSA are addressing this, and that we could serve as a resource.



Screen shot of Title V Report cover

The Law Center Welcomes Development & Communications Associate Selam Aberra

The Law Center is pleased to welcome Selam Aberra as part of our team. A 2013 graduate of the University of Virginia, with a Bachelor's Degree in English and Foreign Affairs, Selam brings a background in fundraising, grant writing, communications, and advocacy to her work at the Law Center. She will be supporting our Development and Communications team. Welcome, Selam!

Thomas J. Mikula, in memorium



We at the Law Center were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of our friend and [Goodwin Procter partner Tom Mikula](#). Tom was deeply committed to pro bono service, and worked with the Law Center as Co-Chair of our Lawyer's Executive Advisory Partners (LEAP) program from 2010 to 2012, hosting events for us, recruiting speakers, and helping us build the program. More than that, Tom was always available for a call or a meeting to strategize, offer advice or just talk about the challenges of legal advocacy on behalf vulnerable Americans. We will miss and always remember him.

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.

www.nlchp.org