

IN JUST TIMES

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NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws, Changing Lives

April 2015

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Dear Friends,

Earlier this year, New Orleans became the first major city to report that it has ended homelessness for veterans, and [other cities are working towards this goal as well](#). This is great news. Change starts with starting the conversation. But as I discuss in a recent [article for Shelterforce](#), we must focus on policies that will not only end homelessness but prevent it as well.



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

Beginning in 2008, Congress appropriated \$425 million to fund new housing vouchers for homeless veterans under the HUD-VASH (HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) program. And beginning in 2010, the VA set aside additional funds from its budget to end veteran homelessness, a sum of over \$1 billion.

What the successes in New Orleans and other cities show is that, given the right amount of resources, it is possible to make headway in addressing homelessness for veterans and even to end it - but more work needs to be done.

This is because **homelessness is not a static condition** that affects only a fixed number of people; **it is a dynamic one that results from the gap between the need for affordable housing and its availability for very low-income people.** According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the [size of that gap is 4.5 million units](#); and according to HUD, it is [growing](#).

Unless this gap is addressed, some low-income people who are caught within it will become homeless, even while homelessness for others is ending. **Strategies to end homelessness for veterans must also include efforts to prevent it.**

This means allocating new resources for affordable housing - and not taking funds away from one set of people in need in order to help those who are homeless, as “targeting” funds often risk doing.

It also means that destructive policies, such as those that [criminalize homelessness](#), must stop. These policies not only harm the people they affect most directly - many of whom are veterans - they also waste critical resources. Ending criminalization will free up these resources for providing housing to veterans - and for other people at risk or experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness *has* ended for many homeless veterans but to truly end and prevent homelessness we must pursue a larger, more comprehensive, goal. **Adequate, affordable housing for all is a [basic human right](#) and the only real long-term answer.**

HUD Issues Draft of Domestic Violence Regulations and Thanks the Law Center



On April 1, 2015 the Department of Housing and Urban Development issued [draft regulations](#) to fully implement the requirements of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (VAWA 2013). This Act extends the vital housing protections the Law Center worked to obtain in its 2005 version to all federally-funded housing, protecting close to 5 million households.

In advance of issuing the regulations, **Gustavo Velasquez, Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing at HUD** called the Law Center, stating:

“I wanted to leave you this message to let you know Maria, well first of all to thank you personally and Eric and everybody within the center that has been so helpful in supporting the work that we've been doing on this VAWA proposed rule....I know that your group has been at the front line of the hard fought renewal in 2013 and I want to thank you for your leadership. It's been very important that groups like yours support this proposed rule that finally we are able to put out there for public comment.”

Groups have 60 days to [comment on the regulations](#). The Law Center will submit comments in partnership with its allies on this issue and pro bono partner Simpson Thatcher to ensure the final regulations are as strong as possible, so that victims of domestic violence will not become doubly victimized by losing their housing as a result of the violence perpetrated against them.

The National Law Center in the News!

The Law Center has been receiving some great press lately – in March alone we were featured in **6 major news outlets** reaching between **14 million and 78 million** readers each month! **Our advocacy is building momentum, and it would not be possible without supporters like you.**

HUFFPOST LIVE

Bills To Limit Welfare In Kansas And Missouri



In Kansas last week, lawmakers voted to restrict welfare recipients from using benefits for certain items and services. A similar bill limiting the scope of welfare has been introduced in Missouri. Do these laws unnecessarily humiliate the poor?

Guests:



Eric Tars @NLCHPhomeless (Washington, DC)
Senior Attorney, National Law Center On Homelessness & Poverty

Host:



Ricky Camilleri
@RickyCam

[Bills to Limit Welfare in Kansas and Missouri](#)

Ricky Camilleri, Huffington Post Live on 4/10/2015

[San Francisco Homeless Shelter to Get a Trail Run](#)

Alejandro Lazo, The Wall Street Journal on 3/23/2015

[Law Targeting the Homeless Under Scrutiny](#)

Suzy Khimm, MSNBC Laws on 3/20/2015

[No Second Chances When it Comes to Housing](#)

Rebecca Burns, Truthout on 3/15/2015

[“Worst nightmares that we are becoming”: Why America’s Treatment of Homeless People is a Disgrace](#)

Elias Isquith, Salon on 3/11/2015

[How a Traveling Consultant Helps America Hide the Homeless](#)

Arthur Delaney, The Huffington Post on 3/9/2015

[Why the Homeless Might be Especially Vulnerable to Police Violence](#)

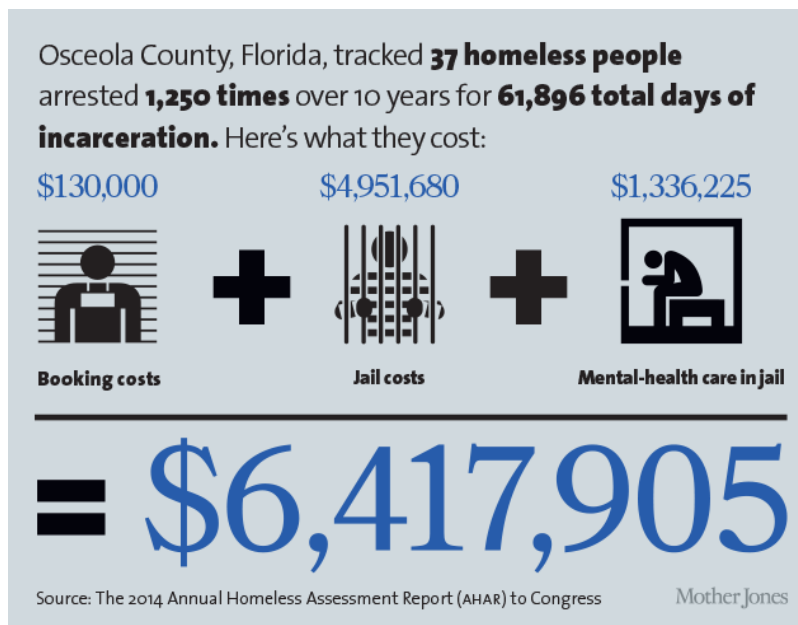
Ned Resnikoff, Al Jazeera America on 3/2/2015

[Click here](#) to see more of the Law Center in the press.

Interested in Working for the Law Center?

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty has open positions for a Legal Director and Attorney to join our team - [click here](#) to learn more.

How Our Advocacy on the Local Level Works



An infographic showing the ineffective and wasteful outcomes of criminalization

The Law Center has recently engaged in successful advocacy to prevent the passage of laws in Miami and Gainesville, Florida that would subject those experiencing homelessness to criminal penalties for camping in public places.

For over two decades, the Law Center has documented a dramatic increase in laws that prohibit an individual experiencing homelessness from conducting harmless, life-sustaining activities in public places. In particular, laws that have banned camping have shown the

greatest uptick in recent years. Indeed, in our most recent report, [*No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in the U.S. Cities \(2014\)*](#), we documented a 60% increase in city-wide camping bans since 2011.

We contacted the City Commissions in Miami and Gainesville to express our opposition to their respective anti-camping proposals, and to explain why criminalization laws fail to address the underlying causes of homelessness, and instead exacerbate the problem by making it more difficult for homeless people to obtain needed housing and employment due to their criminal records.

We also cited the growing body of evidence that criminalization is the **most expensive** method for addressing homelessness, demonstrated in the infographic above. Temporarily cycling people through the criminal justice system **wastes taxpayer dollars**, and also contributes to the overburdening of other costly public services, such as the public health care system.

We emphasized the likely illegality of the anti-camping proposals, as these laws often result in violations of homeless persons' civil and human rights. This was a key point in our advocacy with the City of Miami, currently bound by a consent decree flowing from a federal lawsuit against the City for prior violations of homeless persons' rights by local law enforcement. **We cautioned both cities to consider its exposure to litigation given the findings of our [*No Safe Place: Advocacy Manual*](#) that 71% of lawsuits brought against municipalities for anti-sleeping or anti-camping ordinances since 2011 resulted in decisions favorable to the homeless plaintiffs.**

We also recommended constructive alternative policies with a proven track record of success, such as the Housing First programming that has [saved taxpayer dollars and reduced chronic homelessness in Salt Lake City, Utah by 74%](#).

As a result of our coordinated advocacy with strategic partners on the ground in Florida, voting on the anti-camping proposals in both Miami and Gainesville were indefinitely postponed.

Updates Since Our Last Issue

- Hawaii: After the Homeless Bill of Rights, SB1014, passed the Senate, it was deferred until next year by the House of Representatives. The Law Center will continue to work with local advocates to make sure a Hawaiian Homeless Bill of Rights becomes a reality!

- Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure: Representative Keith Ellison (D-MN) and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) introduced the *Permanently Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act of 2015* (H.R. 1354) and (S. 730) on March 13, 2015.

For more background on these issues, click here to read the [March 2015 issue](#) of *In Just Times*.

Changing Laws. Changing Lives.

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (the Law Center) is the only national organization dedicated solely to using the power of the law to end and prevent homelessness.

With the support of a large network of pro bono lawyers, we address the immediate and long-term needs of people who are homeless or at risk through outreach and training, advocacy, impact litigation, and public education.

www.nlchp.org

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[Infographic on Criminalization, Mother Jones](#)