

# IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

NATIONAL LAW CENTER  
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



*Changing Laws, Changing Lives*

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Dear Friends,

A recent UNICEF report on [child poverty in developed countries](#) ranks the United States number 34 out of the 35 countries it examined. Only Romania ranked lower.

Yet just after this report was released, the U.S. Senate failed to reauthorize the [Runaway and Homeless Youth Act \(RHYA\)](#), which would provide much needed aid to the nation's homeless youth, including funding for street outreach, crisis intervention housing and other basic necessities, family interventions, and longer term housing options when necessary.



Maria Foscarinis  
Executive Director

Each year over 1.6 million unaccompanied youth are homeless, as noted in a [report by the Law Center and the National Network for Youth](#). LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented, constituting some 40% of the total. The RHYA must be reauthorized, and the Senate's failure to pass it is a travesty: more needs to be done to address the needs of homeless youth, not less.

But much can also be done at the federal agency level to remove barriers that now prevent unaccompanied youth from receiving resources and to encourage state and local governments to do so as well. According to our report, which surveyed the laws of all 50 states, the District of Columbia and five United States territories, legal barriers can prevent [homeless youth](#) from receiving the support and aid they need. Worse, punitive laws often [criminalize](#) these youth.

The [U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness \(USICH\)](#) has included ending youth homelessness as one of its priorities, and recently partnered with the True Colors Foundation to host a White House policy briefing on the topic. I was glad to be invited to participate in the event, which brought together federal officials, service providers, advocates and youth and highlighting the tremendous need as well as opportunity for positive change.

We support this increased attention and have made policy recommendations to the USICH. We will continue to support **solutions** to youth homelessness so that each may grow up to escape the burden that no child ever deserves.

## [Housing & Homelessness Addressed at Global Review of U.S. Human Rights Record](#)

On Monday, May 11, the U.N. Human Rights Council [reviewed the U.S.](#) for compliance with its human rights obligations as part of the U.S.'s second [Universal Periodic Review](#). Thanks to [advocacy](#) by the Law Center and others, several countries raised concerns about the lack of adequate housing as well as the criminalization of homelessness in the U.S.

[Click here to hear more about this story.](#)

## [Progress in D.C. Ending Discrimination is an Essential Step](#)



In response to widespread discrimination in the D.C. area against those experiencing homelessness, at times in the form of accessing employment and emergency medical services, **the Law Center is working to broaden the legal protections of homeless persons' rights in the District.** Along with a coalition of national and local homeless advocacy groups, the Law Center has met with the offices of several members of the Council of the District of Columbia, including a personal meeting with Chairman Philip Mendelson, to advocate for two legislative solutions to the problem of discrimination against people experiencing homelessness.

- The first proposal would include “homelessness” as a protected category under D.C.’s existing Human Rights Act, granting protection from discrimination, including barriers to housing and use of public accommodations, equal to the protection granted to other protected classes of people, such as racial minorities and disabled persons.
- The second proposal would enact homeless bill of rights legislation using model language drawn from the best of similar legislation already enacted in Rhode Island, Illinois, Connecticut, and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, and also proposed legislation designed to protect homeless persons from increasingly common criminalization practices, such as California’s Right to Rest Act.

**The reception among D.C. lawmakers has been encouraging.** Indeed, the Council’s Chair Pro Tempore, Kenyan McDuffie, hosted a well-attended issue briefing on the matter on May 1<sup>st</sup>. The Law Center’s Senior Attorney, Tristia Bauman, presented on the growing national trend toward utilizing homeless bill of rights legislation to combat common forms of discrimination. Representatives of the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#), the [People for Fairness Coalition](#), and [Gallaudet University](#) also presented. **The coalition of advocates is hopeful that a sponsor for the proposed legislation will be identified soon.**

**Our New Renters' Rights Survey**



The federal Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act (“PTFA”) expired in 2014, but the Law Center continues to advocate for the rights of renters in foreclosed properties. In support of introduced legislation to reinstate the PTFA and to make it permanent federal law, and to support our efforts to expand the number of states offering similar protections to renters in foreclosed properties, **the Law Center is launching a renters’ rights survey**. The survey is designed to collect information about the plight of renters in foreclosed properties, including ongoing rights violations at the state level. In addition, the survey asks practitioners for information about how the federal PTFA could have assisted the renters that it serves. We encourage anyone working with renters in foreclosed properties, including legal services attorneys and real estate agents, to complete the survey [available here](#).

## **Our LEAP Breakfast with Bank of America**

**On April 23<sup>rd</sup> the Law Center held its [LEAP \(Lawyers Executive Advisory Partners\) Breakfast at the Bank of America Center in Washington, D.C.](#) Speakers included Law Center Executive Director, Maria Foscarinis; Bruce Rosenblum, Managing Director of the Carlyle Group; Angie Garcia-Lathrop, Community Affairs Executive at Bank of America; and Suzanne Turner, LEAP Chair as well as Partner and Pro Bono Chair of Dechert LLP.**



LEAP is the core of the Law Center's work. LEAP members receive priority selection of the Law Center's pro bono work – including cutting edge, precedent-setting projects addressing systemic injustices that help to prevent and end homelessness. LEAP members also provide expertise and advice to help shape the Law Center's work and increase its impact.

In addition to hosting this event, the **Bank of America Foundation has been a generous partner with the Law Center for over five years.** Their support enables us to accomplish many community projects – key to informing our national strategy. A few of the Law Center projects they made possible include:

- In New York, building toward improved systemic compliance with Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Act, which guarantees the rights of homeless children to a stable education
- In Washington, D.C., working with advocates and lawmakers to add people experiencing homelessness as a protected class to the D.C. Human Rights Act to more effectively protect those individuals from discrimination
- Continuing to work with and encourage Federal agencies to move towards adopting policies that encourage cities receiving federal funding to decrease criminalization and promote civil rights

We are grateful to the Bank of America Foundation for hosting our LEAP Breakfast event, for its commitment to ending and preventing homelessness with us over the past five years,

and its enthusiasm for continuing to make a difference in the futures of families and individuals.

## **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](http://www.nlchp.org)

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