

IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws, Changing Lives

May 2016

Stay Connected

[National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#)



♥ DONATE NOW »

Table of Contents

[Funders Together Blog](#)

[Webinar Follow-Up](#)

[Getting an ID](#)

[Huffington Post](#)

[Hello from a Fellow Donor](#)

Dear Friends,

Last month brought some good news for the voting rights of homeless people.

A [federal appeals court ruled](#) that voters who face “daunting obstacles” in meeting the requirements of Wisconsin’s restrictive voter ID law may challenge the law and seek relief that allows them to vote. The decision came in [Frank v. Walker](#), a case filed by the Law Center and the ACLU on behalf of homeless people, other low-income voters, and others affected by the law.



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

For homeless people, getting and keeping an ID and other critical documents can be [extremely difficult or impossible](#). Many homeless people lose their IDs or have them [confiscated in sweeps](#), or are simply unable to get them because they lack an address. Without

the right to vote, homeless people, already marginalized by their status, are even further excluded from “mainstream” society – and from the democratic process.

This election year the right to vote is especially important. While homelessness has so far been largely missing from the political debate, the Law Center and other advocates are working to elevate it. And, to date, [two of the leading presidential candidates](#) have addressed the severe shortage of affordable housing in the country – the driving cause of homelessness – in their platforms.

Meanwhile, upholding the voting rights of homeless people - their right to participate in the democratic process - is critically important. Making that right real will require much outreach, education and support. But establishing the right sends a clear message that the needs and rights of homeless Americans must be addressed.



What would happen if we focused on housing instead of criminalizing people experiencing homelessness?

Check out our [recent blog post](#) on the blog for Funders Together to End Homelessness - a national network of funders supporting strategic, innovative, and effective solutions to homelessness.

The Law Center thanks FTEH for their partnership!

Following Law Center Webinar, San Francisco Introduces Encampment Sweeps Legislation

The Law Center hosted a [webinar](#) on March 30th focusing on **Finding Solutions to Homeless Encampments for more than 30 state and local policymakers**. The webinar featured recommendations from the federal level, as well as presentations on **positive practices in San Francisco and Syracuse**.

A week later, following focused local advocacy by the [Coalition on Homelessness](#), **San Francisco Supervisor John Avalos** [proposed new legislation](#) that would establish rules similar to the Indianapolis law and [USICH Encampments guidance](#) featured in the [webinar](#).

The proposed legislation states that encampments could not lawfully be evicted unless adequate permanent or transitional housing is first made available. More details to come as the proposal goes through a drafting process.

Barriers to Escaping Homelessness: Getting an ID



The lack of ID not only makes it difficult to vote, it makes it difficult to escape homelessness. An ID is generally required to start a job, cash a check, use a homeless shelter, rent an apartment, open a bank account, or access benefits such as food stamps, health insurance, or social security/disability benefits. **And those experiencing the chaos and instability of homelessness are at much greater risk of losing IDs or other identifying documents, or having them stolen. Such documents can be thrown out during an eviction or sweep, stolen because you have nowhere to lock away documents, or lost because of the difficulty of carrying (and keeping track of) all of your belongings everywhere you go.**

But for those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, the barriers to getting an ID can be high; **in most states you also have to pay a fee for the ID**, in addition to any fees to obtain a copy of your birth certificate and/or social security card to prove who you are.

Currently eight states have some kind of fee waiver for people experiencing homelessness to obtain an ID, but even the application for a fee waiver can be an onerous process. For example, Connecticut limits the definition of “homeless person” to those who are staying at a shelter or other facility intended for persons experiencing homelessness. Most other states that have the fee waiver require an application with proof of homelessness or indigency, such as a letter from a pre-approved social service agency. Michigan qualifies anyone receiving means-tested state benefits, but since you need an ID to apply for benefits, the waiver is somewhat circular.

Some models are a little less onerous: California and North Carolina do not require pre-approval from the social service provider; Illinois includes anyone who might imminently lose housing, which could be proven with an eviction notice. Nevada allows self-identification but you are only eligible to receive one free state ID per lifetime. Georgia waives ID fees for anyone living below the poverty line.

Florida waives the regular fee for an ID for anyone experiencing homelessness, but is not counted in the eight because it charges a \$6.25 processing fee. The other 41 states have no fee waiver at all so persons experiencing homelessness also have to find money or a service provider that will assist.

The only state that has fully addressed the ID cost barrier is South Carolina. In South Carolina, no one pays for an ID.

Thank you to the [Arizona-based Homeless ID Project](#), more information can be found [here](#).

HUFFPOST IMPACT

What Is Fair Housing if You Have No Housing?

Check out our most recent article for the Huffington Post Impact section [here](#).

Hello from a Fellow Donor!

Dear Friends of the Law Center,

I have known Maria, Founder and Executive Director of the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, for nearly 20 years – and I have been a supporter of the Law Center’s work since 2000.

In that time I have been truly impressed. I was first drawn to the Law Center's work because they were filling a much needed void - changing policies and advocating for long-term solutions affecting those experiencing homelessness.



I've continued my support for over 16 years because of the tremendous difference that the Law Center has made in so many lives. I believe this work has the power to end and prevent homelessness in our lifetime.

Edward R. McNicholas
Chair, Board of Directors
Partner, Sidley Austin LLP

So whether you are new to the Law Center, or a longtime friend, **I urge you to learn more about the Law Center's work and [click here to see why Law Center supporters have the greatest impact](#)**. As a donor you have the unique ability to give something critical – solutions, hope, and understanding.

Will you please join me, and donate to the Law Center this spring, whether it is **a donation of [\\$1,000](#), [\\$500](#), [\\$250](#), [\\$100](#), or [another amount](#)**, to support the Law Center's work?

Thank you again – together we really can make a difference.

Best regards,

Edward McNicholas

P.S. If you have received [Maria's letter](#) and already given recently to support the Law Center, thank you!

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