

# IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

NATIONAL LAW CENTER  
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



*Changing Laws, Changing Lives*

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Dear Friends,

As we look back on 2015, we can be proud of the [many successes we have won together](#), to protect the basic rights and dignity of homeless Americans - and for solutions to end and prevent homelessness.

With your support, we are starting to [turn the tide against the criminalization of homelessness](#) - and for housing for homeless people.



Maria Foscarinis  
Executive Director

**Going forward, we plan a bold agenda to capitalize on our victories and build even greater momentum and support. The need is still greater than ever and we will persist**

**and redouble our efforts towards our goal of ending the injustice of homelessness in America. Last month, our Board of Directors approved a [new strategic plan for 2016-2018](#) to drive this work forward.**

**Six overarching programmatic goals frame the plan:** Decrease the criminalization of homelessness; increase support for and implementation of the human right to housing; prevent people at risk from becoming homeless; protect and implement homeless children's right to education; sustain, strengthen and build partnerships to carry out these goals; build public awareness and support to move these goals forward.

The Law Center will coordinate and support a new Campaign as a central strategy in advancing these goals, pushing forward an agenda to redirect law and policy away from criminalization and towards the human right to housing. We will also build and support two new networks of local level advocates to inform and help carry out our goals.

Please feel free to [review our new plan](#)! I welcome your comments, please email me at [Maria.foscarinis@nlchp.org](mailto:Maria.foscarinis@nlchp.org).

**Here's to a great 2016 - and to justice and a place to call home for all. As always, thank you so much for your support.**

Maria



## **Report Card: Federal Leadership on Criminalization of Homelessness Needs to Be Matched By Commitment to Housing**

HUMAN RIGHT TO HOUSING REPORT CARD	
Student: United States of America	
CATEGORY	2015
<b>Security of Tenure</b>	
Renters	F
Homeowners	D
Access to Counsel	D-
Emergency & Dire Circumstances	
Criminalization of Homelessness	B
Domestic Violence	C
<b>Availability of Services, Materials &amp; Infrastructure</b>	D-
<b>Affordability</b>	F
<b>Accessibility</b>	C
<b>Habitability</b>	D
<b>Location</b>	B
<b>Cultural Adequacy</b>	D
<b>Overall</b>	D+

**On December 10, 2015, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty issued its [annual report card](#) on the human right to housing in the U.S., praising the progress of the federal government in addressing the criminalization of homelessness, but condemning its ongoing failure to stem the tide of homelessness by ensuring adequate, affordable housing is available to all.**

This year we are happy to report a significant improvement in the federal government’s grade on criminalization in response to international attention and domestic advocacy. Congress [mandated](#) the Administration to address criminalization in 2009, and since 2012, the government has referred to [criminalization of homelessness as a human rights violation](#). This year it accepted a recommendation from the UN Human Rights Council to end it, and has taken several [significant steps to implement that recommendation](#).

Every year, on December 10, the Law Center marks [Human Rights Day](#) by publishing its report card, measuring federal progress toward meeting the human right to housing. **While making significant progress on its grade on criminalization, the federal government continues to fall short in many other areas, receiving failing grades in Renters' Security of Tenure and Affordability, and “D” grades in several other areas.**

“The Administration has taken some major steps toward making sure homeless people are not punished for simply trying to survive without homes,” explained Eric Tars, Senior Attorney at the Law Center and primary author of the report. “Now it’s up to Congress and state and local governments to make sure people aren’t forced to live without homes in the first place, so we can all enjoy the basic human dignity that comes with a safe, adequate place to live.”

Find the report card [here](#) and read more about it on the [Huffington Post Blog](#).

## Why Do You Give to the Law Center?



Thank you so much to Meg Roberts, whose employer, Impact Communications Inc., recently donated to the Law Center - here is what she has to say about why she directed this gift to the Law Center:

**"There are so many important considerations when trying to determine the best use of a charitable donation.** Do I want to give locally, nationally or internationally? Do I want to support a “cure” or meet an immediate need? Should I focus on a specific issue or something more complex? **The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty makes these decisions easy for me.** Their work broadly reaches all areas around the world, but has direct impact on local communities. **They search for long-term solutions while advocating for steps that will have immediate returns. Though homelessness and poverty are specific issues, the causes and ramifications are far reaching and include education, health care, and community development, just to name a few.** As we face increasing problems locally with unaffordable housing and the lasting effects of recession as well as immediate needs globally to rehouse Syrian refugees, I choose to support NLCHP in an effort to address both issues."

Her original post can be found [here](#). Meg works for Impact Communications as their Senior Director in charge of their gift planning division. She lives in Annandale with her husband, Scott and their 2 year-old son Nate. In her spare time, she enjoys running, knitting, horseback riding and daydreaming about the day she may actually have “spare” time.

## DOJ to Law Enforcement: Don't Criminalize Homelessness



On December 9, 2015, the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services published a [newsletter encouraging law enforcement to promote alternatives to the criminalization of homelessness](#). The newsletter, which reaches more than 6,500 subscribers across the country, included articles produced in coordination with the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health & Human Services, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty.

Find the article here, [Alternatives to Criminalization: The Role of Law Enforcement](#).

## **Fighting the Criminalization of Homelessness in Puyallup, Washington**

Homelessness is growing in the small, rural community of Puyallup, Washington, located thirty-five miles south of Seattle. **Puyallup does not have a single emergency shelter bed located within the City or within any of its neighboring towns, and yet the local government has enacted a series of laws that leave homeless people with no lawful place where they may sleep, sit, or lie down.**

Most recently, the City amended its trespass ordinance to permit all designated public employees to issue trespass notices to anyone suspected of violating local laws. With no shelter options, and faced with a patchwork of laws that make it illegal to rest in public places, homeless people will be unable to avoid violating local laws, and thus the trespass law, which may result in banishment from public property for a minimum period of 45 days up to five years.

**Perkins Coie has generously agreed to provide pro bono support to the Law Center to assist with evaluating legal challenges to the criminalization of homelessness in Puyallup.**

The Perkins Coie team is led by partner Sherilyn Peterson, who recently accepted the 2015 American Bar Association's Exceptional Service Award on behalf of her firm for her work with the ABA's Death Penalty Representation Project. Also on the team are associates Antoine McNamara, Carmen Wong, and paralegal Kimball Mullins. The Law Center is very

grateful to Perkins Coie for their pro bono support and Harkness Furniture for their financial support of our work in Puyallup.

## **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)