

IN JUST TIMES

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NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws, Changing Lives

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Dear Friends,

The Law Center is excited to join the new Data-Driven Justice Initiative (DDJI) launched by the White House on June 30.

Every year, more than 11 million people cycle through local jails, many on low-level, nonviolent crimes. [Many are homeless, poor or mentally ill. They suffer significant harm as a result of incarceration, which makes it more difficult for them to access employment, housing and public benefits—and increases the likelihood that they will be incarcerated again.](#)



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

The new White House Initiative will help local communities across the country use data to disrupt this destructive cycle, and its leaders invited the Law Center to join this effort as a partner organization. To date, [sixty-seven local jurisdictions \(cities, counties, and states\) have signed up to participate.](#)

The Law Center will help facilitate a national Data-Driven Justice Initiative Working Group on Housing, helping communities interested in implementing best practices in law enforcement and housing policy and ensuring full compliance with federal law and policy on homelessness.

This is an especially important time for this initiative. Across the country, as homelessness grows, many cities have been using expensive criminal justice resources to deal with social service failures, [criminalizing homelessness by making it illegal for people to sit, sleep, and even eat in public places.](#)

Laws and policies that criminalize homelessness and poverty violate constitutional rights, create barriers to exiting homelessness in the form of arrest records and fines and fees, and don't work. **The evidence is clear that homelessness, and its cost, are reduced in communities that focus on housing and services, and not those that focus on policing and incarceration** as an attempted solution.

Federal guidance and policy increasingly call on communities to turn away from policies that criminalize poverty and homelessness, and the new DDJI initiative is an important complement to these [new policies.](#)

For information about DDJI and the Law Center's new working group, contact our Senior Attorney Eric Tars at etars@nlchp.org. While the working group is aimed at local jurisdictions, we welcome input on this work from all our partners.



President Obama listens to inmates during a discussion at a federal prison in El Reno, OK
Photo credit: [Official White House Photo by Pete Souza](#)

Law Center Joins White House for Data-Driven Justice Initiative to Combat Criminalization of Homelessness

The White House announced on June 30 the launch of its [Data-Driven Justice Initiative](#) with a coalition of participants who have committed to using data-driven strategies to divert vulnerable people, including people experiencing homelessness and mental illness, out of the criminal-justice system and into supportive housing and other appropriate services. These innovative strategies, which have measurably reduced jail populations in several communities, help stabilize individuals and families, better serve communities, and often save money in the process.

In advance of the launch, Law Center Deputy Director Janet Hostetler and Senior Attorney Eric Tars participated in a national convening at the White House with representatives from many of the participating communities. At the invitation of the Domestic Policy Council, they served as key experts in criminalization of homelessness and constructive alternatives, offering thoughts and advice to participants as they join the Data-Driven effort. The Law Center will help offer ongoing consultation and training to participating communities through a working group on housing and homelessness issues to be developed in collaboration with the Corporation for Supportive Housing and other organizations.

HUD Increases Incentives for Decriminalizing Homelessness

[The Department of Housing & Urban Development](#) announced on June 29 its new grant application for homeless service Continuums of Care (CoC), a highly-competitive \$1.9 billion grant stream, with new language offering maximum points to Continuums that “indicate specific strategies to ensure homelessness in not criminalized.” This year’s application strengthens the incentives by increasing the points assigned to anti-criminalization strategies: last year’s application gave two points for applicants who could indicate strategies for both anti-criminalization and affirmatively furthering fair housing; this year’s application gives two points solely to anti-criminalization. It also includes specific examples of activities CoCs can undertake, such as “engaging or educating local policy makers, engaging or educating law enforcement, implementing community plans, or engaging or educating businesses.” The Law Center provided a [webinar](#) last year to assist CoCs in developing and implementing plans to address criminalization, and will continue to provide assistance with this year’s application.

The Law Center's Annual LEAP Breakfast



The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty held its 2016 Annual [LEAP](#) (Lawyers Executive Advisory Partners) Breakfast on June 16 at the Bank of America building in Washington D.C. **The LEAP Program includes attorneys from corporate legal departments and law firms who provide pro-bono services, instrumental to the Law Center's mission to prevent and end homelessness.**

Speakers included Helen Kanovsky, General Counsel, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development; Law Center Executive Director, Maria Foscarinis; Bruce Rosenblum, Managing Director at the Carlyle Group and LEAP Corporate Advisor; Larry Chattoo, Assistant General Counsel at Bank of America; and Peter Thomas LEAP Chair and Managing Partner at Simpson Thacher LLP's Washington D.C. office.

Speakers shared about their pro bono projects instrumental to the Law Center's mission to prevent and end homelessness. They also addressed the importance of fighting the criminalization of homelessness on a local and national level and the tremendous impact pro-bono efforts can have on communities across the country. View pictures from the event [here](#).

Media Blitz on Homelessness



Homeless man lying on concrete in San Francisco
Photo credit: [Bill Morrow \(CC BY 2.0\)](#)

On Wednesday, June 29th, outlets across the country created an unprecedented media blitz targeting solutions to homelessness. Over 70 organizations teamed together to flood the media with information about homelessness via all channels: online, print, radio and television. This initiative was spearheaded by the editor-in-chief of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Audrey Cooper, who was motivated by her first-hand experiences with reporting on homelessness in the city. Washington D.C. and Seattle media organizations also contributed to the effort. The Law Center supported these efforts nationally including those by Washington D.C. based [Street Sense](#) and [ThinkProgress](#), educating the public and inspiring social action.

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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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