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NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws, Changing Lives

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Dear Friends,

Earlier this month, over 150 advocates from across the country gathered at the [2017 National Forum on the Human Right to Housing](#), which this year focused on the Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign. It was an inspiring, energizing, diverse event, as we planned strategy for fighting against criminalization and for housing.

High on our list of concerns were the proposed [cuts to housing and other social programs](#) in the Trump Administration's budget and the announced roll back of criminal justice reforms. While we were strategizing at the Forum,



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

HUD Secretary Ben Carson was testifying before the House and Senate, defending the proposed 15 percent cut to his agency’s budget.

While the budget is not expected to be enacted by Congress, the danger is that it will set a new and dangerous baseline of what is “reasonable,” focusing attention on fighting the most draconian cuts instead of advocating to meet the growing need. In fact, during his testimony Secretary Carson himself acknowledged that the current HUD budget meets a fraction of the need, reaching just one in four Americans who are poor enough to qualify for assistance.

And as a new report details, work at the current minimum wage does not pay enough to afford housing. The resulting poverty and homelessness is not a “state of mind,” it’s simple arithmetic.

Housing is a basic human need—and it’s a human right. At the Forum, we resolved to fight for housing—and against increased criminalization. Resources now being wasted to punish people for their homelessness and poverty should be used instead for housing. And the Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign has proposals for doing so.

Join us! Together we will move forward. Thank you for your support.



Over 150 Advocates Plan Next Steps for Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign at 2017 Forum

On June 6-7, 2017, more than 150 current and formerly homeless persons, advocates, attorneys, and government officials met at the 2017 National Forum on the Human Right to Housing, focused on the Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign. The meeting was hosted at the law firm of Sidley Austin, LLP, and supported through sponsorships from Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, Fish & Richardson LLP, and Kirkland & Ellis LLP; additional support was provided by Microsoft and GLG Law.

The diversity of participants was the highlight of the conference, lending itself to incredibly rich discussions from lived experience blended with legal knowledge and advocacy expertise. Through sponsorships and paid ticket sales, the Law Center was able to provide scholarships for more than twenty homeless and low-income advocates, 90 percent of those who applied. The Forum expanded its reach by live-streaming video of several of the plenaries and keynotes, which have received over 2,000 views since.

The conference concluded with two-hour strategy workshops to help advance the Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign through organizing, litigation, messaging, and policy advocacy. A full summary of the outcomes and next steps from these sessions is forthcoming, but some plans include joint days of action across the country, consultation on litigation strategy, and specific messaging for various audiences.

Law Center Joins ACLU Lawsuit Challenging Houston's Criminalization Laws

The Law Center and LEAP member Dechert LLP joined as co-counsel with the ACLU of Texas in a constitutional challenge to two recently enacted Houston ordinances prohibiting panhandling and outdoor encampments. The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas, alleges that restrictions on speech and life-sustaining activities in public space violate homeless plaintiffs' First, Fourth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights.

“In recent years, Houston has admirably managed to reduce homelessness by half by pursuing sensible and compassionate solutions to this nationwide crisis,” said Trisha Trigilio, staff attorney for the ACLU of Texas. “But these latest ordinances abandon that humane approach. The City says they’re meant to get people into shelters with ‘tough love,’ but the truth is the shelters are full and Houston’s homeless have nowhere else to go.”

Due to the lack of alternative locations where homeless people can sleep, store needed belongings, and perform other unavoidable acts of survival, the lawsuit alleges that criminally punishing such life-sustaining activity amounts to a criminalization of homelessness itself. The ACLU, the Law Center, and Dechert seek an injunction against the City of Houston to prevent enforcement of the unconstitutional ordinances against a class of homeless individuals.

Plaintiffs emphasize that this case is about more than protecting homeless persons' basic constitutional rights. “The main thing these laws take from us is our dignity,” said Plaintiff Tammy Kohr. “We’re not bad people; we’re just trying to survive.” Plaintiff Eugene Stroman added, “This law shows little respect or sympathy for the impoverished people of Houston.

Living in shelters just isn't an option for us, but if you can't find your own place to live, you're treated like a criminal."

Law Center Responds to Trump's Deregulation Executive Order

In implementing President Trump's executive order to reduce regulatory burdens, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") issued a notice and request for public comment on May 15, 2017 to assist in identifying existing regulations that may be outdated, ineffective, or excessively burdensome. HUD invited the public to comment on any regulations that should be repealed, replaced, or modified and what factors HUD should consider when implementing the deregulation executive order. The Law Center, with support from a pro bono team at Simpson Thacher, LLP, took the lead to submit comments on June 14, 2017 that highlight the importance of and need for preserving regulations implementing the Violence Against Women Act ("VAWA"). The VAWA housing protections ensure the safety of domestic violence victims and their children and protect their right to access and maintain federally subsidized housing.

A Win in New York for Homeless Children!

The Law Center has long advocated for New York State to fully comply with the McKinney Vento protections for homeless children's access to stable, appropriate schooling. This month, the State finally corrected one area of non-compliance by amending its state dispute resolution process to ensure homeless students are enrolled and provided transportation while a dispute is pending. This change will restore children's rights and guarantee that homeless students can continue their education uninterrupted until the State issues a final decision on any McKinney-Vento dispute. Changes go into effect this July.

Maria Foscarinis Meets with U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters

On May 24, days after President Trump announced a 14 percent decrease of HUD's budget—the most drastic cut to affordable housing since President Reagan's budget cuts led to modern homelessness—Executive Director Maria Foscarinis met with Congresswoman Maxine Waters and other homelessness and housing advocates to strategize on opposing Trump's budget plan.



Our Homes, Our Voices: Housing Day of Action July 29

The Law Center has joined with other organizations around the country to launch the July 29th Day of Action to support affordable homes for all. Please join in an action near you or start one if no one else has. Find out more information at ourhomes-ourvoices.org.



HUFFPOST

Housing Budget Needs Increases, Not Cuts

Read Maria Foscarini's latest [article for the Huffington Post](#), and please share widely on social media!

Updates from the Law Center: New Staff, AmeriCorps VISTAs, and Summer Interns

We're pleased to welcome a new staff person, three AmeriCorps VISTAs, and six summer interns to the Law Center!

Vincenza Githens is the Operations Manager for the Law Center, handling administrative, human resources, and financial oversight responsibilities. Vincenza brings nonprofit operational experience from organizations providing direct human services to those in need. Originally from Norfolk, Virginia, Vincenza graduated with an A.A.S. in Accounting and a B.A. in International Relations. She is a member of the Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance.

Lisa DeBone serves as the Development and Communications VISTA. She served a year with AmeriCorps NCCC FEMA aiding in disaster planning, response, and recovery in Louisiana, West Virginia, and Florida. Lisa earned a Bachelor of Arts in Advertising and Public Relations from Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in her home state of Michigan.

Sara Yae Jin Kang serves as the Networks VISTA, developing the Law Center's network and building organizational capacity, focusing on the Law Center's Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign. She graduated from Seattle Pacific University with a BA in Political Science, and she was a legislative intern for Washington State Senators Carlyle and Cleveland and a fellow at the Slade Gorton International Policy Center.

Darrell Stanley is the Database VISTA, maintaining the Law Center's litigation history, program activity, and news tracking databases. After receiving his Ph.D. in geophysics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he worked for thirteen years as a geophysicist at an energy company and has done volunteer work in the U.S., Peru, and Ecuador.

Luna Floyd is a rising junior at Brown University studying public policy with a focus in human rights. She hopes to pursue her passion for economic justice and LGBTQ rights as she helps advocate for homeless youth in the education system. Luna also plans to bring some best practices in homelessness advocacy back to her home community of Pensacola, Florida.

Isaac Katz is currently pursuing his J.D. at Georgetown University Law Center after graduating from Oberlin College with a B.A. in history and working as a paralegal in employment discrimination and social security disability. He interned last summer for FairVote, a non-profit dedicated to making democracy more fair, functional and representative.

Reed McLaurin is a rising senior at Duke University studying public policy. In the past three years, Reed has worked extensively on issues of homeless and poverty, forced displacement, and LGBTQ rights. He hopes to pursue a career in civil rights advocacy after graduation.

Hannah Mitchell comes from Denver, Colorado where she has just completed her second year of law school at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law. Originally from Arizona, she graduated from Arizona State University in May 2015 with a B.S. in communication. Hannah is passionate about civil rights and human rights.

Samuel Olivant holds a Bachelor of Arts in History & Political Science, Bachelor of Laws, and is expecting his Master of Laws (LL.M.) in International Human Rights in August 2017 from Fourah Bay College University of Sierra Leone and Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, respectively. He served as president of the Human Rights Clinic for three years where he advocated for students' and citizens' rights.

Priya Vaishampayan is a rising senior at Tufts University studying political science. She is passionate about social justice and hopes to gain a better understanding of how law, policy and media can be used as powerful tools to combat homelessness.



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