

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 that key federal agencies are beginning to work with the Mayors' Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness to address the criminalization of homelessness.

The Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness is a national initiative announced by First Lady Michelle Obama in 2014, and amplified by the HUD Secretary, by leaders across HUD, VA, USICH, and by the National League of Cities.



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

The call of the challenge is for mayors to make a commitment to ending veteran homelessness in their cities, and to support this effort, federal agencies have created a variety of materials and [host regular calls with cities.](#)

Criminalization affects many homeless veterans, and [impedes their ability to exit homelessness](#) . **So we are pleased that the call hosted by federal agencies last month for city leaders who are part of the Challenge focused on the criminalization, and the position that key federal agencies have taken against it.**

These include the brief filed by the U.S. Department of Justice in the Law Center’s challenge to an anti-camping law in Boise Idaho, guidance from the USICH advising cities not to forcibly evict people from encampments but to house them instead, and HUD funding incentives directed at cities to encourage them to [reduce criminalization](#).

Ending veteran homelessness - and all homelessness - is possible, but criminalization is at cross-purposes with that goal. **By saddling people with an arrest record and sometimes jail time, it creates additional barriers to housing, employment and public benefits.** It also wastes public resources on ineffective, not to mention inhumane and costly measures that do nothing to solve the problem, draining precious dollars that could be much better spent on housing and services.

Learn more about why criminalization doesn’t work - and constructive alternatives to it - [here](#).

Fair Housing Assessment Tools

How do policies around homelessness, nuisance ordinances, and eviction histories contribute to segregation and other fair housing violations?

Last year, HUD published a new regulation to help local governments, states, and public housing agencies (PHAs) reduce segregation and increase access to opportunity in communities throughout the country. This month, the Law Center—along with allied organizations such as Shriver, National Network to End Domestic Violence, and Coalition for Juvenile Justice—sent comments to HUD on how to improve the assessment tools that HUD published along with the regulation.



In particular we said:

1. When communities criminalize homelessness or otherwise exclude people experiencing homelessness from public space, segregation may be perpetuated and disparities in access to opportunity based on race and disability may be increased. The same happens if policies exclude service providers from neighborhoods or whole communities.

2. When communities use “nuisance ordinances” in ways that lead to the eviction of victims of gender-based crimes, including domestic violence, they may be unfairly reducing housing opportunities and increasing housing costs disproportionately for women, families with children, and racial and ethnic minorities.

3. When publicly supported, affordable housing providers (such as public housing agencies) use eviction history to bar applicants. They may exclude people for the exact same thing that makes them eligible for housing assistance: inability to pay market rent. Without a more detailed look at eviction histories, this information can lead to excluding the same people who are most likely to experience evictions, including racial and ethnic minorities and women with children.

Read our comments here: [HUD AFFH-LocalGovComments](#)

Here are some additional information sources:

- [HUD AFFH-State Insular](#)
- [HUD AFFH-PHA](#)
- [HUD AFFH-Local Government](#)

Delaware Homeless Bill of Rights Passes Committee, on Way to Full Senate Vote



On May 18, a packed room of advocates testified on behalf of [Delaware Senate Bill 134](#), the “Bill of Rights for Homeless Individuals,” at a hearing before the Delaware Senate Community/County Affairs Committee.

The Bill provides for equal treatment of homeless persons in accessing public spaces, governmental resources, employment, housing, shelter, food, healthcare, and voting; it would also create administrative mechanisms for enforcing these rights.

Law Center Senior Attorney Eric Tars led off the testimonies, followed by DeBorah Gilbert White, Executive Director of [HerStory Ensemble](#) and a formerly homeless individual—the primary driver of the bill. They were followed by a series of powerful presentations involving directly affected homeless persons, providing faces and stories showing why the bill’s protections are needed.

Ms. White later thanked the Law Center, stating, “thank you for taking the time to add to the discourse for Delaware’s bill. You provided invaluable information and connected the national efforts to our local issue. Your presence was greatly appreciated.”

The bill’s progress has also been greatly aided by the support of its sponsors, Sen. Bryan Townsend, Rep. Stephanie Bolden and Rep. Sean Lynn, and their staffer Leann Moore. Since the hearing, HerStory Ensemble has been successful in getting the City of Wilmington to pass a resolution endorsing the bill.

The bill passed out of Committee and will be voted on by the full Senate in the coming weeks.

At-Risk Youth Medicaid Protection Act

The Law Center supports and endorses the “At-Risk Youth Medicaid Protection Act” (S.2874, H.R.5100). This bipartisan bill tracks one of the Law Center’s recommendations in [Alone Without A Home](#) and provides a technical fix to prevent youth who have come into contact with the justice systems from losing their health insurance. **This legislation would provide for states to suspend but not terminate Medicaid coverage for incarcerated children and youth up to the age of 21, and would allow for such benefits to resume as soon as eligible individuals return to their communities.** Improving reentry systems and services for youth, including access to appropriate medical and behavioral health care, is an important step in reducing recidivism and ending and preventing youth homelessness. A copy of the House version is available [here](#).

Help the Law Center through Cy Pres

Courts across the country have directed cy pres and court awards to programs that provide legal services to people experiencing poverty, like the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, **recognizing that these programs serve an important societal purpose and are well-managed, non-partisan, nonprofit organizations that provide effective services to the community, the courts, and their clients.** To learn more about cy pres and how this can benefit legal nonprofits like the Law Center, please [click here](#).



**Apply to join our
Development and
Communications team
today!**



The Law Center is looking for a Development and Communications Assistant or Associate. Learn more about the position [here](#) or visit nchp.org/employment.

Welcome Aboard, LaToya Ball!

We are happy to welcome LaToya Ball to the Law Center. LaToya looks forward to building relationships within the community. Learn more about LaToya below:

“Growing up in the most powerful city in the nation (Washington D.C.), I never could understand why there was so much homelessness and poverty being ignored. I believe we are all one class of people and as a community our duties include, helping, being kind, and uplifting each other. As one of the wealthiest nations, I would like to see unification on the issue of poverty and homelessness, and for it to be addressed as an act of justice. Everyone should have an even opportunity to be afforded the basic necessities of life.”



As the Administrative Manager, LaToya contributes to the Law Center’s strategic goals, annual plans and supports the organization’s growth. LaToya manages administrative matters, which includes human resources, financial oversight, and development and implementation of appropriate policies and procedures.

LaToya has an extensive background in the nonprofit sector providing administrative leadership to organizations that promote social justice and awareness. Her interest was sparked in the social justice field while volunteering at local churches and hospitals providing support to the community. LaToya specializes in business administration and management, and received her B.S. from the University of Maryland University College in the same field.

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