

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 12, 2016

The Law Center Announces A Major Bipartisan Victory to House Homeless People Using Surplus Federal Property

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#) (the Law Center) announced a major victory that will create housing for people experiencing homelessness by using surplus federal property. The Law Center worked with a bipartisan coalition in Congress on the Federal Assets Sale and Transfer Act of 2016 (FAST Act), which reforms how the federal government disposes of its property, including property for homeless services under Title V. The FAST Act (H.R. 4465) passed the U.S. House of Representatives in May of 2016, and then passed the U.S. Senate by unanimous consent on December 10, 2016. The bill is expected to be signed into law.

“I helped design the Title V program when it was originally enacted in 1987, and the Law Center has worked tirelessly since that time to help homeless service providers make use of it,” said Maria Foscarinis, Founder and Executive Director of the Law Center. “We are thrilled to have worked closely with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to strengthen this critical homeless services program, and help save millions of public dollars in the process.”

Signed into law in 1987, Title V of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act provides state agencies, local governments, and non-profits with a right of first refusal to obtain free unused federal property to provide homeless services. To date, over 500 buildings and nearly 900 acres of land have been transferred to homeless service organizations in over 30 states to provide meals, emergency shelter, medical care, food banks, job training programs, and other services to over 2 million people each year.

Even this success represents a small fraction of the Title V program’s potential. The FAST Act improves transparency into the federal government’s real property holdings by, among other things, requiring the General Services Administration (GSA) to publish a database of all federal real property on its website.

The FAST Act also improves the Title V program by streamlining the application process and eliminating some of the initial steps that an applicant must take before completing an initial application for property. It grants applicants with important flexibility in deciding whether to take the property by deed or lease, and requires that properties available under the Title V program be advertised on GSA or the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development's website. Perhaps most critically, the legislation makes explicit that property transferred under the Title V program can be used to provide permanent housing to homeless people, with or without supportive services.

“With steadily rising housing costs and an increase in unsheltered homelessness across the country, the need for new resources to end homelessness through access to affordable housing has never been greater,” said Tristia Bauman, Senior Attorney for the Law Center. “Free access to un-used federal property to meet local homeless housing and service needs is precisely the kind of efficient use of resources that our communities need.”

The Law Center is grateful to Covington & Burling LLP for its generous pro-bono support and assistance with this successful legislative advocacy effort.

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The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (www.nlchp.org) is the only national organization dedicated solely to using the power of the law to prevent and end 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.