



NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, D.C. (December 16, 2014) *The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH)* is partnering with the *National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (Law Center)* to provide members of the media, congressional staff, and activists an opportunity to meet Arnold Abbott and shed light on the national issue of criminalization of people who are homeless and those who are helping them. Arnold Abbott, the internationally renowned activist for homeless people, will be the event's main speaker. Mr. Abbott has received significant media attention in the past two months for openly refusing to abide Fort Lauderdale, FL's new law that criminalizes the act of sharing food with homeless and needy persons.

Arnold Abbott is a 91-year-old World War II veteran, who founded a non-profit called Love Thy Neighbor in 1991, which ensures that homeless individuals receive hot meals in downtown Fort Lauderdale. Since the passage of this ordinance in November, Mr. Abbott has received three court summons and faces at least \$1,500 in fines and up to 180 days in jail. He maintains that he has the constitutional right to continue feeding his neighbors and will continue to do so despite any personal consequences. A judge recently suspended the law by imposing a 30 day ban on any new arrests/citations for this "crime". Mr. Abbott [co-authored a petition](#) calling for the repeal of this ordinance that has received over 100,000 signatures.

"We can't understand why the City of Fort Lauderdale would try to prevent volunteer groups from acting charitably," said Jerry Jones, Executive Director of the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#). A report released by the organization in October, [Share No More](#), cited 21 other cities that have passed similar legislation in the past two years. This method of attempting to push the homeless population out of sight has been attempted in over 70 American cities.

Maria Foscarinis, Executive Director of the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#), explained, "At a time when more Americans are suffering from hunger and falling into homelessness, making it a crime for charitable groups to share food with their neighbors in need is terrible policy. Unfortunately, they are part of a larger national trend: Many cities are choosing to criminalize the necessary conduct of homeless people—such as sleeping, sitting and eating in public-- despite a lack of available resources such as food, housing and even shelter. Such laws threaten the human and constitutional rights of homeless people, impose unnecessary costs on cities, and do nothing to solve the problems they purport to address." In July, the Law Center released [No Safe Place](#), a report which documents this escalation of criminalization through a survey of 187 cities. Last year, the Law Center won a federal court challenge to a Dallas, TX ordinance that restricted food-sharing; last week, following a favorable settlement agreement, the Dallas City Council voted to alter the city's law to loosen its restrictions.

On December 18, 2014, Arnold Abbott will be available for comment at the 4:30 pm in the Congressional Meeting Room South of the Capitol Visitor Center. He provides a unique perspective on the importance of food-sharing programs and best practices for assisting people who are experiencing homelessness. Also speaking at the event will be LaTasha Lee from U.S. Representative Hastings' Office as well as Jeremy Rosen of the Law Center to discuss the national perspective including the recent settlement of a similar food sharing case in Dallas and Michael Stoops of NCH.

For more information, please call Michael Stoops at (202) 462-4822 x 234 mstoops@nationalhomeless.org or Sarah Knutson at (202) 638-2535 x105 sknutson@nlchp.org. Thank you for your time and attention.

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National Coalition for the Homeless (www.nationalhomeless.org) is a national network of people who have experienced homelessness, activists, advocates, community and faith-based service providers, and others committed to a single mission of working to prevent and end homelessness while ensuring that the immediate needs of those experiencing homelessness are met and their civil rights are protected.

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 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.