

IN JUST TIMES

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NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws, Changing Lives

December 2014 Newsletter

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Dear Friends,

"Drop that plate right now" - Ft. Lauderdale police officer to Arnold Abbott, the [90 year old activist who was arrested for offering food to homeless and poor people in a public place](#), as recounted by Abbot to the media.

As millions of Americans struggle to meet basic needs, cities across the country are targeting private groups that are trying to help.



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

Laws that criminalize the basic survival acts of homeless people are rising sharply, as [we recently documented](#). Even as many communities have far fewer resources - affordable housing, living wage jobs or even shelter spaces - than people in need, an increasing number of cities have chosen to treat as crimes the survival activities of people forced to live outside.

And as if that wasn't bad enough, private groups that are trying to bridge the gap between need and resources are [being targeted as well](#). Typically thinly veiled efforts to move dire poverty out of public view, these laws further marginalize those who are already excluded from basic opportunity. And by not only passing such laws but deploying police to enforce them, cities like Fort Lauderdale call to mind Ferguson and Staten Island, where unarmed African American men were killed after being stopped on suspicion of

No Safe Place, No Safe Place: Advocacy Manual, & CERD Housing Report

minor street crimes.

Homeless people- disproportionately people of color-and those trying to help should not be targeted by the criminal justice system while the real issues of homelessness, poverty and inequality go unaddressed.

Last year, the Law Center won [a federal court case against the City of Dallas challenging such a law](#). Earlier this month, we published [a new manual](#) to help groups around the country criminalization, and push for constructive solutions instead.

The good news is that we're winning: most of the litigation that we and others have brought is succeeding. And while we continue this fight, we also work for solutions to end and prevent homelessness. As our new report card on the status of the human right to housing in the U.S. shows, we have much more to do.

With your support we are making a difference. Thank you and best wishes for the holidays.

Human Right to Housing Report Card and a Human Rights Guide!



Picture by [Tori Rector \(CC BY-SA 2.0\)](#)

The Law Center marked December 10, [Human Rights Day](#), by publishing its annual **Human Right to Housing Report Card**, its fourth since 2011. When judged against international standards, the U.S.'s policies come up as failing or close to it on many fronts. "Everyone needs a place to call home, and the human right to housing is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But unfortunately, for millions of Americans that right is not a reality. And it is especially cruel that those who are homeless are subjected to criminal punishment because our own government fails to ensure the human right to housing," said Maria Foscarinis, Executive

Director of the Law Center.

On the same day, the Law Center published **Human Rights to Human Reality: A Ten-Step Guide to Strategic Human Rights Advocacy**, discussing the steps it has taken to bring international attention to criminalization and turn it into domestic policy. This user-friendly guide, produced in conjunction with the [Human Rights at Home Campaign](#), is aimed at advocates who have initial familiarity with the human rights framework but are trying to figure out the best way to use the standards and mechanisms as part of their own advocacy strategies.

"Working consistently for the past two decades, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty is achieving unprecedented success in getting federal agencies to address the criminalization of homelessness as a human rights violation," said Eric Tars, Law Center senior attorney and primary author of the report. "While our road to our success has not been direct or easy, this guide presents ten steps as a case study of our experiences that we believe can help others achieve broader respect for, and implementation of, human rights."

The Law Center hosted a webinar to launch these reports and its new [criminalization advocacy manual](#). To view a recorded version of the webinar, [click here](#).

U.N. Torture Committee Calls for More Action Against Criminalization of Homelessness

On November 13 and 14, the [U.N. Committee Against Torture](#) held a [two-day review](#) of the U.S.'s record of compliance with the [Convention Against Torture](#). Law Center Senior Attorney Eric Tars traveled to Geneva for the hearings and produced a series of short video reports on his advocacy there, which can be viewed here: [Day 1](#), [Day 2](#), [Day 3](#), [Day 4](#).

Nepali Committee member Sapana Pradhan-Malla raised the [recommendations of two other U.N. monitoring bodies](#) who had critiqued the U.S. on criminalization earlier this year, saying, "I'm hoping the U.S. government will commit to implementing the recommendations of the [Human Rights Council](#) and the CERD Committee to use federal grant funding incentives to decrease the criminalization of homelessness. We are really encouraged with your commitment to values-absolute prohibition of torture. We want to see these values translated in the law, in institutions, in the resources, in the mindset, in the life of each and every person."

This U.S. government delegation, however, failed to address criminalization during the hearing.



The inquiry came as the result of a [report](#) submitted to the Committee by the Law Center; many national and local organizations joined us in endorsing the report.

All three of the treaty bodies which monitor U.S. compliance with the human rights treaties it has ratified have now specifically addressed criminalization of homelessness as a concern under these treaties. This [record](#) will form part of the consideration of the U.S. under the [Universal Periodic Review](#) by the U.N. Human Rights Council, to take place next May.

In the meantime, the Law Center will continue to work with federal agencies to implement funding incentives to decrease criminalization.

Patty Murray Receives her Bruce F. Vento Award in Person

Last week, Maria Foscarinis and Jeremy Rosen, together with Dwight Fettig, who served as Chair of the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty's](#) McKinney-Vento Awards 2014 Host Committee, presented Senator Patty Murray with her Bruce F. Vento award in person.

The [16th Annual McKinney-Vento awards](#) was held on September 30, 2014. Due to the Senate schedule Senator Murray was unable to attend in person, and we were delighted that she was able to make time for us this week. We recognized Senator Murray because of her steadfast dedication to those who are most deserving but often do not receive the representation in the law that they deserve. She has been instrumental in protecting the education rights of homeless children and supporting funding for affordable housing. Most recently, thanks to Senator Murray,

there is language that defends the rights of homeless persons in the new Childcare Act that passed the Senate at the end of November.

The Law Center is honored to work with Senator Murray. She is policy maker who understands that when we change the laws, we are changing lives.



Pictured: Jeremy Rosen, Maria Foscarinis, Patty Murray, and Dwight Fettig

To learn about all of our 2014 honorees, [click here](#).

How Can You Help those who are Homeless this Holiday Season?

The [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#) would like to wish all of our friends, advocates, partners, and supporters a wonderful holiday season. As we look forward to celebrating this joyous time of year, those who are without a home are particularly in our thoughts.

When you donate to the Law Center, you give those living without a home hope that one day they will have a safe, warm place to call home.

Many of you may already be volunteering and donating toys. [This year please consider also giving to our 25th Anniversary Campaign](#). Your generous support can create long-term change. When you give to the Law Center, you help us address systemic obstacles that those experiencing

homelessness face, and advocate for the solutions that will enable them to one day have a place to call home. We want everyone to have the opportunity to sit at their own table and enjoy a holiday dinner with their families. You are giving them that chance.

For our 25th Anniversary Campaign, one of our very special supporters has offered to match your donation dollar-for-dollar up to \$25,000. You can make your [tax-deductible donation here](#).

Thank you for joining us. Best wishes to you and your family for a wonderful holiday season.



Picture by [Johanna Lundin \(CC BY-ND 2.0\)](#)

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.

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