

# IN JUST TIMES

*a publication of the*

NATIONAL LAW CENTER  
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



*Changing Laws, Changing Lives*

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Dear Friends,

It's September, and school has started for millions of children around the country. Among them are over 1.3 million homeless students.

For me, the start of school was always a mix of anticipation and anxiety: What would my teachers and classes be like? Would I have friends? Would I have the right clothes? Would I fit in?

Imagine facing the first day of school without the stability of a home, the certainty of regular meals, school supplies, or clean clothes. Basic things no child should have to worry about.

At the Law Center, we are working hard to smooth the way for these kids—and we are winning major victories.



Maria Foscarinis  
Executive Director

Our work in Congress and the courts has created and strengthened rights for homeless children and youth to attend school, to remain in the school they were in before they became homeless, to get transportation, books, clothes, and meals, to have access to school programs and to after-school programs, including sports and other extracurricular activities.

These rights are part of the [McKinney-Vento Education law](#), which we helped draft and get enacted.

Our manual, [No Barriers](#), explains these rights and how to put them into practice. It has gone out to thousands of schools, advocates, service providers, parents and youth across the country.

Our [Project LEARN](#) has brought together a network of advocates from around the country to help us monitor these rights and to make sure they are being implemented.

Starting October 1, these rights will be stronger as the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), enacted last December, goes into effect, significantly strengthening the McKinney-Vento Education law, thanks to years of advocacy by the Law Center and our allies. And last month, the US Department of Education issued [strong guidance](#) implementing the law, incorporating the comments of the Law Center and our Project LEARN partners.

This coming week, at our annual McKinney-Vento [Awards Ceremony](#), we'll [honor one mother](#) who stood up for the right of her child to go to school; with the help of the McKinney-Vento Education law and the Law Center, she won.

Homeless students still face challenges—but thanks to the Law Center and our allies, they'll have a better chance at overcoming them, and a path to a better future.

Thank you for all you do to make this critical work possible.



**Meet Our 2016 McKinney-Vento Personal Achievement Award  
Honoree - Angela Spencer**



*Angela Spencer and her son Amarion (Photo Courtesy of Angela Spencer)*

The Law Center is proud to recognize Angela Spencer as our 2016 Personal Achievement Award Honoree, for her advocacy and dedication to further her son's education.

Angela and her son Amarion faced the realities of homelessness when Angela was furloughed from her job. Unable to find a new full-time position, she endured losing her home to the foreclosure crisis and soon began living doubled-up with close family and friends.

Amarion felt the rippling effects of homelessness when his school challenged his enrollment status. His school district argued that Amarion and his mother did not live within the proper district to attend his school. The school subsequently unenrolled Amarion several times due to his homeless status.

Attempting to keep stability in her son's life, Angela sought assistance from the Law Center. Working in partnership with Angela and her attorney, the Law Center extended expert legal assistance to her attorney, providing a full description of the federal protections available to homeless students and ongoing support.

After working tirelessly to provide her son with his educational rights, Angela succeeded in helping Amarion stay in school. Now nine-years-old, Amarion has educational stability and is receiving the attention he needs for his learning disabilities. In addition to his academics, he has found a passion in sports – especially basketball and football.

Angela now holds full-time employment and has brought her family out of homelessness.

It is an honor to present Angela with our 2016 Personal Achievement Award, and we hope that you will join us for our annual McKinney-Vento Awards Ceremony on September 22<sup>nd</sup>!

Would you like to attend this year's celebration? [Click here](#) to learn more about the 2016 McKinney-Vento Awards!

## #WeAreWinning - Turning the Tide Against Criminalization and for Housing

When you're defending the rights of America's most marginalized, with too many headlines of homeless encampments being evicted or new criminalization ordinances being proposed, it can be important to note and celebrate victories. This year, the Law Center staff started internally using the hashtag "#WeAreWinning" when sharing little (and big) victories with each other... and we started to notice an important pattern.

Here are a few of the #WeAreWinning tags since the beginning of this year:

1. [Camping bans were struck down](#) by two courts in Everett and North Bend, WA with a brief that cites our *Bell v. Boise* case and the [Department of Justice \(DOJ\) brief](#) in *Bell* supporting the case's foundational arguments.
2. [Indianapolis, IN](#) passed a groundbreaking ordinance that requires alternative housing to be provided to residents of homeless encampments before they are evicted. This ordinance was based on the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) [Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments Guidance](#) that we helped to develop. The Indianapolis model is already being considered in [Seattle, WA](#) and [San Francisco, CA](#).
3. Attorneys in Marysville, CA were able to [delay a planned eviction of a homeless encampment](#) and get [alternative housing and storage](#) provided for camp residents with our assistance in using the DOJ *Bell* brief and the USICH guidance.
4. Chicago, IL stopped a planned mid-winter eviction of a homeless encampment, and is instead developing a new policy on the removal of encampments using the USICH guidance, following our collaboration with local advocates and Chicago officials attending our [webinars](#).
5. Akron, OH [repealed a panhandling ordinance](#) and negotiated a new policy on encampments with our assistance. We discussed legal strategy and precedent with local ACLU counsel who relied on our materials, and cited our case [Norton v. Springfield](#) in the policy briefing.
6. We similarly provided technical assistance to local advocates that helped stop a proposed panhandling law in Miami, FL, and helped repeal or get moratoria on enforcement of several other laws in [Rhode Island](#).

There is a lot more work to be done, but these victories are already making a real difference in the lives of homeless people from coast to coast, and show how federal victories are creating real change around the country. None of these local victories would happen without the partnership of homeless persons, advocates, and attorneys with whom we work. By supporting their work with our national expertise and federal advocacy, we're making sure these local victories are adding up to a strategic trend that will help many more in the months and years to come. #WeAreWinning

## Through the Lens - Capturing the Criminalization of Homelessness



*Law Center staff members help to facilitate discussion during the HUD screening of "Under the Bridge." (Photo Courtesy of The National Law Center)*

Have you seen *Under the Bridge*? If you have not had the chance yet, we recommend you take a moment to watch this poignant documentary, chronicling the lives of homeless individuals residing in tents in Indianapolis, and the criminalization they face for their homeless status.

Don Sawyer (one of our partners and the executive producer of this film) and his team need our help to expand this film to a larger audience. Please show your support via this Facebook [page](#). Like the page, indicate that you are interested in the documentary, and help spread the word!

Check out the official trailer for *Under the Bridge: The Criminalization of Homelessness* [here](#).

## Welcome Aboard, Grace!

We are happy to welcome Grace Elizabeth Beal to the Law Center. She looks forward to building relationships within the community and with the Law Center staff! Learn more about Grace below:



*(Photo Courtesy of Angie Tracey - Frozen In Time Photography)*

*“My mother once told me of a time when my great-grandfather would open his doors to the less fortunate. The impoverished would go door to door within the community looking for household jobs or a small bite to eat. Though he never held the position to extend employment, he would always invite them in for a warm meal with the help of his wife. This truly inspired me, as my family was impoverished themselves. It was opportunity that led my grandparents to success, as they began their own business within the mid 1900’s. My parents would always stress the value of opportunity and to take every prospect that came my way. What leads me to distress is that those who are less fortunate do not have the same gateway to opportunity.”*

Grace previously worked for The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society as a Campaign Specialist. She also has prior experience working with domestic violence victims, as she volunteered at local shelters. While working with the children of victims, Grace truly saw the impact of how not only violence, but homelessness can lead to a difficult transition at a critical time in their development.

Grace now serves as the Development and Communications Assistant for the Law Center. Within this position, Grace wishes to enhance the knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act in order to diminish the current levels of homelessness & poverty within this country, as well as within the heart of our nation’s capital.

Grace earned her B.A. in Communication Journalism and received recognition for a double minor in Political Science & Women's and Gender Studies from High Point University. She also received recognition for her international journalistic work while furthering her studies at Oxford Brookes University, in Oxford, England.

## **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](http://www.nlchp.org)