

# IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

NATIONAL LAW CENTER  
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws, Changing Lives

May 2018



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Dear Friends—

Last month, new proposals from the Trump Administration threatened further harm to homeless and poor Americans, including [rent increases for already struggling families](#) and new [policies that may keep homeless immigrant children out of school](#). At the same time, harmful rhetoric blames poor people and warns that the meager help provided is making people [“too comfortable.”](#)



Maria Foscarinis  
Executive Director

As I wrote in a recently published article, [“Strategies to Address Homelessness in the Trump Era: Lessons from the Reagan Years,”](#) the current climate recalls the early 1980s, when homelessness was first becoming a national crisis. Then-president Reagan called it a “lifestyle choice,” not an issue for the federal government, and many liberal Democrats initially agreed. Yet a multipronged, bipartisan campaign that brought together “strange bedfellows” won the enactment of the first major federal legislation to address homelessness, now known as the McKinney-Vento Act, in 1987.

Drawing lessons from that early advocacy is especially important now, as we and other advocates fight destructive policies and rhetoric that mushroom daily. At the Law Center, we are making common cause with both long-time partners and seemingly unlikely allies—such as law enforcement leaders who support our bold agenda for housing, not handcuffs.

We know this may be a long fight, and we keep our eyes on our goal: a place to call home for every person in America. As we work towards it, we fight daily battles, including filing suit in federal court for [basic information from our government](#). We celebrate incremental victories that [secure housing rights for vulnerable tenants](#). And we prepare to come together to strategize at our annual [National Forum on the Human Right to Housing](#) on June 27.

We persist, and we will prevail. Thank you for joining us.



Maria Foscarinis  
Founder & Executive Director

## UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing Leilani Farha to Keynote National Forum

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty is pleased to announce that Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, will be the keynote speaker at this year's National Forum on the Human Right to Housing on June 27 at Sidley Austin LLP in Washington, D.C. For the past 20 years, Farha has worked internationally on the implementation of the right to adequate housing for the most marginalized groups. A lawyer by training, she also serves as executive director of [Canada Without Poverty](#).

People who are currently or formerly homeless, attorneys, government officials, and advocates from across the country will gather at the Forum to organize and strategize on ways we can work to end the criminalization of people experiencing homelessness. View the agenda and register now at [www.nlchp.org/forum](http://www.nlchp.org/forum).

## Law Center Files Two FOIA Lawsuits

The Law Center is suing the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) for failing to turn over documents under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), requested to monitor whether GSA has been complying with Title V of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The law states that suitable unused federal property must first be offered for homelessness services, at no cost, before going on the market. GSA plays a crucial role in implementing Title V by ensuring unused federal property is used to prevent and end homelessness. GSA has failed to comply with the law in the past, and it is concerning that information is being withheld, making it impossible to determine whether its practices are currently compliant. The Law Center [has an injunction against GSA](#) and other federal agencies requiring implementation of the Title V program. The Law Center's pro bono partner, Sidley Austin LLP, filed the FOIA complaint against GSA in April in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

Following months of informal advocacy and formal administrative appeals, with joint representation by [Public Citizen Litigation Group](#), the Law Center [filed suit](#) on April 27 challenging the denial of a fee waiver for a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In May 2017, the Law Center sent a FOIA inquiry, requesting documents related to communities' responses to a question about criminalization of homelessness on their applications for the Continuum of Care Program funding. In making the request, the Law Center requested a waiver of fees for searching and copying, noting that the statutory considerations for granting a fee waiver—the documents sought were not for a commercial purpose, but to inform the public about a matter of public interest—were met. HUD, however, took months to respond to NLCHP's request and then denied the fee waiver request and failed to produce the requested records. Strangely, another of the Law Center's FOIA requests with the agency had its fee waiver granted, and it is unclear why the Law Center would meet the criteria for one request and not another. The Law Center hopes to quickly resolve this matter with HUD in order to be able to share important information with Continuum of Care applicants regarding best practices in stopping criminalization.

## Law Center to Develop Handbook of Legal Rights for D.C. Homeless Youth with Baker McKenzie and the Walt Disney Company

Law Center Attorney Michael Santos with pro bono attorneys from the law firm of Baker McKenzie LLP and the Walt Disney Company kicked off the start of the development of a legal rights' handbook for homeless youth living in the District of Columbia on May 7 in New York. The Law Center conducted a training for the attorneys in New York, California, and Florida assisting with the project and provided an orientation about laws and policies that affect youth experiencing homelessness in D.C.



## NEWS from the LAW CENTER

### 2018 Summer Interns

We're pleased to welcome the following social justice advocates for the 2018 Summer Intern Program!

**Janna Driskel** is a political science major at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Janna has gained vast volunteer and intern experience combatting poverty while utilizing her expertise in research and data analysis. She has researched child poverty and hunger, organized hunger awareness events, interned with the Nebraska State Legislature, and worked on national policy research relating to SNAP, childhood hunger, and place-based poverty. Through personal experience, research, volunteer work, and advocacy, Janna decided to center her life's work around releasing the grip of poverty on individuals and removing the constant fear created by impoverishment.

**Darren O'Connor** is a Chancellor Scholar at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law. His passion for the rights of people experiencing homelessness led him to leave a successful engineering career so he could personally be involved in challenging how we deal with homelessness nationally, and locally in his hometown of Boulder, Colorado. In Boulder, he can be found at a City Council meeting, on the streets filming the police, or trying to keep up with his twelve-year-old daughter, Alexandra, and partner, Elz, both of whom are now faster than him running the paths of Boulder since he started law school.

**Joanna Su** is a recent high school graduate of The Madeira School and will be attending Johns Hopkins University in the fall, majoring in international studies. Prior to interning at the Law Center, she worked and taught students with disabilities in United States and China, and thoroughly researched governments' policies towards people with disabilities.

## Jobs at the Law Center

**Executive Assistant:** The Law Center is seeking a full-time Executive Assistant to provide support to the Executive Director, in coordination with the Development and Communications team. The Executive Assistant also maintains administrative and operations-related duties.

For details on these and other career opportunities, visit [nlchp.org/employment](http://nlchp.org/employment).



## NLCHP in the Media

**Real Change News (May 9):** [HUD Proposes Rent Increases on Public Housing Tenants](#)

**Spare Change News (May 9):** ['Welfare Reform' Poised to Exclude People in Need From Assistance](#)

**Community Impact (May 7): [Collin, Denton Counties Homeless Census Shows Change, But Experts Say Numbers May Not Be Full Picture](#)**

**Cincinnati Enquirer (May 7): [How Does Cleaning Tent Cities Fight the Larger Issue of Homelessness?](#)**

**Johnson City Press (May 4): [JCP Week in Review](#)**

**Triad City Beat (May 3): [Greensboro's Anti-panhandling Ordinance Comes Under Legal Fire](#)**

**LA Times (May 3): [On the Grounds of People's Park, UC Berkeley Proposes Housing for Students and the Homeless](#)**

**John City Press (May 3): [Activists Call for End to Johnson City's Proposed 'Camping' Ban](#)**

**KPFA (May 1): [Rising Up with Sonali](#)**

**Ventura County Star (Apr. 25): [Homeless Need Compassion](#)**

**DC Bar (Apr. 23): [Member Spotlight: Homeless Advocate Tristia Bauman](#)**

**Yes Weekly (Apr. 23): [Homeless People Call on Greensboro's City Council to Repeal Unconstitutional Laws That Criminalize Homelessness](#)**

**Akron Beacon Journal (Apr. 19): [Attorney Challenges Anti-panhandling Law in Barberton](#)**

## Events

### June 8: RSVP for LEAP Luncheon

Join the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and fellow members of the Lawyers' Executive Advisory Partners (LEAP) at our **annual luncheon** hosted by Simpson Thacher on June 8 from noon to 2:00pm ET. Network with fellow leaders of pro bono programs at major law firms and corporate legal departments, and hear from dedicated pro



bono attorneys working to end and prevent homelessness in America. Whether you are part of a LEAP member firm or interested in joining LEAP, all are welcome to attend, but RSVPs are required by June 6. To RSVP, email [mardiente@nlchp.org](mailto:mardiente@nlchp.org). For more information about LEAP, visit [nlchp.org/leap](http://nlchp.org/leap).

### **June 27: National Forum on the Human Right to Housing**

[Register](#) for the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty's annual **National Forum on the Human Right to Housing**! People who are currently or formerly homeless, attorneys, government officials, and advocates from across the country will gather in Washington, D.C., to organize and strategize on ways we can work to end the criminalization of people experiencing homelessness. Register and learn more at [nlchp.org/forum](http://nlchp.org/forum). For more information about law firm and corporate sponsorship opportunities, contact Development & Communications Director Maggie Ardiente at [mardiente@nlchp.org](mailto:mardiente@nlchp.org).



### **Maria Foscarinis at ABA Forum**

Law Center Founder & Executive Director Maria Foscarinis spoke at the ABA Forum on Affordable Housing Conference in Washington, DC, on May 23 from 6-7pm. She presented on her recently published article, "[Strategies to Address Homelessness in the Trump Era: Lessons from the Reagan Years.](#)"

### **Equal Justice Conference**

Senior Attorney Tristia Bauman presented to a packed room at the 2018 Equal Justice Conference on May 11 in San Diego, California. The conference was hosted by the American Bar Association and brought civil legal aid community together to discuss the legal service needs of poor people. Bauman's session, "The Criminalization of Poverty: Homelessness, Bail Reform, and Employment," described the growing trend of criminalization of homelessness and



highlighted alternative policies for preventing and ending it. The session also featured co-presenter Samantha Howell, executive director of the National Association of Social Workers New York State Chapter, who presented on the costliness of mass incarceration and the need for bail reform.

## **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)