

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement on Hurricane Irma: Disaster Assistance for People Experiencing Homelessness Must Be Provided Without Discrimination or Delay

(September 12, 2017, Washington, D.C.) – Maria Foscarinis, founder and executive director of the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, issued the following statement:

“There is no shortage of natural disasters this year, with hurricanes, wildfires, and earthquakes leaving thousands of people displaced and many facing the possibility of homelessness. While the impact is devastating for all affected, low-income communities, including people who were already homeless, were especially hard hit.

Hurricane Irma’s devastating impact has already left thousands of people in the Caribbean islands homeless, and potentially thousands more in the southeastern United States. Inadequate housing, including trailers, was more vulnerable during the hurricane, and occupants of such housing were less likely to have insurance. In Daytona Beach, people who were previously homeless [reported being turned away](#) from shelters set up for the storm.

At the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (Law Center), where we work daily to help homeless Americans across the country, we are grateful to emergency responders and service centers working on the ground in Florida, in addition to the thousands of people across the country who have donated generously to support disaster relief efforts. Yet we remain deeply concerned about people who were previously homeless before Irma, and the thousands more who are now homeless as a result of Irma, who need access to housing, services, and education.

It is important that all disaster assistance be provided, without discrimination or delay, to the most vulnerable individuals and families, including those who were experiencing homelessness at the time of the disaster. Federal, state, and local governments must ensure that families and individuals experiencing homelessness are eligible for the same benefits as other hurricane victims, are not criminalized for sleeping or other life-sustaining behaviors in public places, and that children can receive access to education and enrollment in public schools. The Law Center is working with our national, state, and local partners to provide policy recommendations to federal, state, and local government leaders to ensure these and other protections for America’s most vulnerable population.

A community struck by disaster is more likely to achieve full recovery promptly if it is economically stable prior to sustaining damage. The man-made disaster of poverty and homelessness magnifies the impact of a natural disaster. In the long-term recovery of the nation's most recent disasters, it is imperative to advance proven solutions to ending homelessness. The Law Center is committed to ensuring that those who have been displaced by Hurricane Irma receive the legal support they need to access safe housing, services, and education.”

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty's [Homeless Education Advocacy Manual: Disaster Edition](#), issued first in response to 2005's Hurricane Katrina and with a new forward in 2017 after Hurricane Harvey, provides further information and resources on how displaced children and youth can remain in school.

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[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 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.