

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 1, 2016

Contact: Eric Tars
(202) 638-2535 ext. 120
ETars@nlchp.org

White House Uses Data to Stop Criminalization of Homelessness *HUD Supports with Increased Grant Incentives*

Washington, D.C. - The White House announced Thursday the launch of the Data-Driven Justice Initiative with a **bipartisan coalition of sixty-seven city, county, and state governments who have committed to using data-driven strategies to divert “super-utilizers” of the criminal justice and healthcare systems, including chronically-homeless individuals with mental illness, out of the criminal-justice system and into supportive housing and other appropriate services.** These innovative strategies, which have measurably reduced jail populations in several communities, help stabilize individuals and families, better serve communities, and often save money in the process.

This complements the [Department of Housing & Urban Development’s announcement Wednesday](#) of its **new grant application for homeless service Continuums of Care, a highly-competitive \$1.9 billion grant stream**, with new language offering maximum points to Continuums that “indicate specific strategies to ensure homelessness is not criminalized such as engaging or educating local policy makers, engaging or educating law enforcement, implementing community plans, or engaging or educating businesses.”

Maria Foscarinis, Executive Director of the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#) was pleased to announce that **it will lend its more than 25 years of experience working at the intersection of criminal justice and housing to the effort:** “We welcome the focus of the White House on these critically important issues. **Many communities across the country are criminalizing homelessness, effectively turning them into “super-utilizers “of the criminal justice system—at great cost to the people themselves, to city budgets and to our country’s fundamental values.** We look forward to working with the DDJI communities to ensure full compliance with federal law and policy on homelessness and implement best practices to stop wasteful criminalization

practices and put resources to better use.”

“Across the country, cities faced with increasingly visible homelessness have been using expensive criminal justice resources to deal with social service failures, essentially [criminalizing homelessness](#) by making it illegal for people to sit, sleep, and even eat in public places,” said Janet Hostetler, Deputy Director of the Law Center. **“These laws and policies violate constitutional rights, create barriers to exiting homelessness in the form of arrest records and fines and fees, and don’t work.** The evidence is clear that homelessness, and the costs of homelessness, are reduced in communities that focus on housing and services, and not those that focus on policing and incarceration.”

“We are pleased the Administration is following the [recommendations of international human rights monitors](#) to take concrete actions to prevent and end criminalization of homelessness,” said Eric Tars, Senior Attorney at the Law Center. “These new steps build on the [Department of Justice’s brief filed in our case](#) fighting a camping ban in Boise, ID, stating criminalizing homelessness is unconstitutional, and its Office of Community Oriented Policing Services focusing a [newsletter on criminalization](#), and the [U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness guidance](#) stating evicting homeless encampments without providing adequate alternative housing is never appropriate.”

The Law Center looks forward to working with the Administration to achieve the important goals it has set out in the Data Driven Justice Initiative and to help communities fully implement the federal agency policies against criminalization of homelessness.

For more information please see the [Interactive Map of DDJ Jurisdictions](#) and [DDJ Fact Sheet](#).

###

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 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.