

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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Tent Cities on the Rise Across America *Report Documents Constructive and Destructive Approaches*

Washington, DC – Homeless encampments have been documented in almost every state across the country, with many more going unreported, according to a new report from the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and the Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic at Yale Law School.

“Homeless people have been resorting to tents for many years in communities where inadequate housing options exist,” said Maria Foscarinis, Executive Director of the Law Center, “But with an economic recovery that hasn’t made it to the poorest Americans, we’re seeing encampments become permanent parts of our nation’s landscape. It’s a shocking development in a country that clearly has the resources to do better.”

The report, [*Welcome Home: The Rise of Tent Cities in the United States*](#), documents media reports of homeless encampments in 46 of 50 states. It discusses positive and negative approaches taken in four case studies, in Providence, R.I, Lakewood, N.J, St. Petersburg, FL, and New Orleans, LA, and analyzes applicable state, federal, and international human rights law.

“The fact that so many people across the United States have resorted to living in tents highlights the failure to serve members of our society who have fallen on hard times,” said Sirine Shebaya, a Lowenstein Clinic member and 2012 graduate of Yale Law School. “Tent cities also demonstrate that every human being has a basic need for housing as well as to be a member of a community. Local governments should not disrupt residents’ lives and force them even further into the shadows, but instead should find sustainable solutions that respect their dignity and include them as partners in the decision-making process.”

“While individuals may ‘choose’ to live in an encampment, it is our collective choices as a society that force this choice due to failure to create adequate affordable housing solutions or even the basic safety net of adequate shelters,” said Eric Tars, Director of Human Rights & Children’s Rights Programs at the Law Center, “Tent cities represent our country’s failure to guarantee the human right to housing, and should never be considered permanent solutions; but where they exist, residents must be treated with respect and only evicted by making adequate alternatives available.”

The report builds on previous Law Center reports on the criminalization of homelessness which emphasize that criminalization of homelessness is not only legally and morally improper, but fiscally imprudent for communities. *Welcome Home* contains a number of policy recommendations that can be implemented by federal, state, and local authorities. Later this month, the Law Center will participate in an inter-community discussion hosted by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness focused on homeless encampments.

The Law Center also held a webinar on Thursday, March 6, which discussed the report and other issues of concern. A recorded version of the webinar can be viewed [here](#).

For all media inquiries, please contact Selam Aberra at saberra@nlchp.org.

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The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty is a leader in the movement to prevent and end homelessness. To achieve its goal, the Law Center uses three main strategies: policy advocacy, public education, and impact litigation.