2021 McKinney-Vento Awards

October 12, 2021
3 PT / 6 ET
Thank you for attending the 23rd Annual McKinney-Vento Awards. These awards pay tribute to two outstanding national leaders, Stewart B. McKinney and Bruce F. Vento, by celebrating individuals and organizations that have advanced solutions to end homelessness.

Our 2021 honorees have led the way in the fight against homelessness, taking a stand against injustice, and we are proud to recognize them for their shared commitment to a future where everyone can not only survive, but thrive.

This year the National Homelessness Law Center presents the Stewart B. McKinney Award to two incredible storytellers, Jessica Bruder and Chloé Zhao. In Bruder’s book *Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century* - made into a Golden Globe and Oscar winning film - she tells a compelling, eye-opening tale of the dark underbelly of the American economy. The book not only received countless honors and awards, but more importantly it reached readers with profoundly personal stories of the realities of houselessness.

And building upon the real tales shared in Bruder’s book, Zhao included many of the people featured - cast as themselves - in the film. This brave and thoughtful choice ensured that the voices of people living in their vehicles were heard, loud and clear. In her film, Zhao weaves together the pain and loss that has led to houselessness with the resilience of the people experiencing it.

We present the Bruce F. Vento Award to U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters, for the second time, for her enduring fight for housing and racial justice. Waters was first honored for her work in passing the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009, and her unwavering commitment to ending homelessness has continued. Waters has continued to use her leadership position in Congress to bolster bold, meaningful change at a time when we cannot stand to do any less.

The Law Center is proud to present the Pro Bono Counsel Award to Sullivan & Cromwell. Since the Law Center’s founding in 1989, Sullivan & Cromwell has been a steadfast pro bono partner - in fact, it was Sullivan & Cromwell’s commitment to pro bono work that allowed our founder to start her fight
toward ending homelessness and led to the founding of the Law Center. Over the past year, Sullivan & Cromwell has made an especially powerful impact with its work to identify the responses enacted by communities across the country to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These Awards give us an opportunity to honor leaders and changemakers fighting to end homelessness, to celebrate the successes that we have all shared over the past year, and to honor the power of federal legislation.

2021 has been a year of reckoning. Though there has been much work to do, the introduction of bold new federal bills adds to the foundation laid over three decades ago. Decisive steps will not only implement real solutions, but provide the funding necessary to end homelessness in America.

Ending homelessness is possible. This year’s honorees show us that, in different ways, each of us can make a difference for those experiencing homelessness. It takes the combined efforts of many individuals to demand a "new" normal, in which we will not discard our unhoused neighbors. Thank you for your partnership and support of our critical work.

Sincerely,

Antonia Fasanelli,
Executive Director,
National Homelessness Law Center

Jacqueline O’Garrow,
Chair, 2021 McKinney-Vento Awards Host Committee

Dwight Fettig,
Co-Chair, Fund Development Committee

Matthew Murchison,
Co-Chair, Fund Development Committee

Eric Bensky,
Chair, Law Center Board of Directors
The National Homelessness Law Center created the McKinney-Vento Awards to recognize individuals and organizations that have advanced solutions to homelessness and poverty. These awards also pay tribute to two outstanding national leaders: Stewart B. McKinney and Bruce F. Vento.

In 1987, the late Congressman Stewart B. McKinney was a primary sponsor of landmark legislation providing federal assistance to Americans experiencing homelessness. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was the first—and is still the only—federal legislation addressing homelessness. With the Stewart B. McKinney Award, the Law Center is proud to honor leaders who exemplify the patriotism and compassion of Congressman McKinney.

The late Congressman Bruce F. Vento worked in partnership with Stewart B. McKinney and served as one of the original authors of the McKinney Act. After his untimely death in 2000, the legislation was renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in recognition of Congressman Vento’s resolve to help homeless persons become self-sufficient. The Bruce F. Vento Award honors those who demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to addressing homelessness.

The Law Center also presents the Pro Bono Counsel Award to a law firm that exhibits the commitment of the legal profession to provide pro bono legal services that significantly transform the lives of men, women, and children who are homeless.

The McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act is the first and only significant federal legislative response to homelessness. It was passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on July 22, 1987. Since then, millions of dollars each year go to support a wide range of services to people experiencing homelessness, from emergency shelter programs to education access for children. The act also established the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, an independent federal agency within the U.S. executive branch that leads the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness.

This event serves as an annual fundraiser for the National Homelessness Law Center, ensuring that it has the resources necessary to continue its work as the legal arm in the movement to end homelessness. And this event provides all of us with an opportunity to honor the legacy of past changemakers and to celebrate the momentum of current changemakers.
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STEWARDB. MCKINNEY AWARD

Jessica Bruder, author of Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century

Jessica Bruder is a journalist who writes about subcultures and social issues.

Bruder is the author of Burning Book and, with co-author Dale Maharidge, Snowden’s Box: Trust in the Age of Surveillance. Jessica has been teaching narrative storytelling at Columbia Journalism School and contributing to The New York Times for more than a decade.

For her New York Times-bestselling book Nomadland, she spent months living in a camper van, documenting itinerant Americans who gave up traditional housing and hit the road full time, enabling them to travel from job to job and carve out a place in a precarious economy. The project spanned three years and more than 15,000 miles of driving — from coast to coast and from Mexico to the Canadian border. Nomadland won the Ryszard Kapuściński Award for Literary Reportage and the Discover Award. It was a finalist for the J. Anthony Lukas Prize and the Helen Bernstein Book Award. The New York Times named it both a Notable Book and an Editors’ Choice. Nomadland has now been translated (or is forthcoming) in 24 languages.

Through her writing, Jessica has helped give a face, a name, and a story to the thousands of people living in vehicles every year in America. And for not only elevating these stories, but for empowering those whose stories they are, the Law Center is humbled to honor Jessica Bruder, along with Chloé Zhao, with this year’s Stewart B. McKinney Award.
STEWART B. MCKINNEY AWARD

Chloé Zhao, Academy Award winning Writer, Director, Editor, and Producer of Nomadland

Chloé Zhao is a Chinese writer, director, editor and producer. She was born in Beijing, raised there and in Brighten, England. After moving to the US, she studied Political Science at Mount Holyoke College and Film Production at NYU. Her feature debut, Songs My Brother Taught Me, premiered at 2015 Sundance Film Festival. Her second feature, The Rider, premiered at Directors Fortnight at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival and was awarded the Art Cinema Award.

Her most recent film, Nomadland, premiered at the 2020 Venice Film Festival and was awarded the Golden Lion. The film and Chloé also earned the industry’s highest acclaim including Golden Globe®, BAFTA, DGA, PGA Awards and 3 Academy Awards®, including Best Director, Best Actress in a Leading Role, and Best Picture. Chloé co-wrote and directed Marvel Studios’ Eternals, which is scheduled for release November 5, 2021.

In Nomadland, Chloé is true to the people who live without a permanent home every day in America, and her collaboration with and honor to them is unmistakable. The connection created between the viewer and the "nomads" on screen is a connection often broken between housed and unhoused neighbors in real life, and that connection is the spark to real change. For her beautiful, gracious creation of the film Nomadland, the Law Center is so proud to honor Chloé Zhao, along with Jessica Bruder, with the Stewart B. McKinney Award.
2021 Honorees

BRUCE F. VENTO AWARD

Congresswoman Maxine Waters (CA-43)

Congresswoman Maxine Waters is considered by many to be one of the most powerful women in American politics today. She has gained a reputation as a fearless and outspoken advocate for women, children, people of color and the poor.

Waters was born in St. Louis, Missouri, the fifth of 13 children reared by a single mother. She began working at age 13 in factories and segregated restaurants. After moving to Los Angeles, she worked in garment factories and at the telephone company. She attended California State University at Los Angeles, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree. She began her career in public service as a teacher and a volunteer coordinator in the Head Start program.

Congresswoman Waters made history as the first woman and first African American Chair of the House Financial Services Committee. An integral member of Congressional Democratic Leadership, Congresswoman Waters serves as a member of the Steering & Policy Committee and is the Co-Chair of the bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease. She is also a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and member and past chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

In addition to her work supporting eviction moratoria and necessary immediate legislation to protect renters and homeowners during the COVID-19 pandemic, Waters has used this moment to introduce permanent sweeping advancements in the fight to end homelessness. Congresswoman Waters introduced a groundbreaking housing package to committee in July, and the Law Center is proud to have worked with her and other members of Congress to build a foundation to end homelessness for good. The Law Center is proud to honor Congresswoman Maxine Waters for the second time with the Bruce F. Vento Award.
PRO BONO COUNSEL AWARD

Sullivan & Cromwell LLP
Accepted by Julia Jordan and Justin Smallwood

Sullivan & Cromwell was founded in 1879 and comprises more than 875 lawyers who serve clients around the world through a network of 13 offices, located in leading financial centers in Asia, Australia, Europe and the United States. The Firm is headquartered in New York.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sullivan & Cromwell’s pro bono staff have identified the responses enacted by communities across the country to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. S&C attorneys monitored and synthesized news alerts into an accessible spreadsheet that we used to assess how communities were serving the needs of unhoused people in real time. The resources created by Sullivan & Cromwell not only helped the Law Center’s advocacy, it helped local advocate and organizers proactively protect their communities.

Julia Jordan is a partner in Sullivan & Cromwell LLP’s Washington D.C. office. She serves as co-head of the Labor & Employment Group and Whistleblower Litigation & Workplace Investigations Group. She is a member of the Firm’s Pro Bono Committee. Prior to joining S&C, Ms. Jordan served as an assistant district attorney in the New York County District Attorney’s Office, where she prosecuted a wide variety of cases and tried numerous jury and bench trials.

Justin Smallwood is a member of the Firm’s Litigation Group, working in the criminal defense & investigations and civil litigation practices. He also contributes to the Firm’s pro bono practice, particularly housing matters. Justin is a member of both the Firm’s Associate Experience Committee and its Network of Black & Latinx Lawyers.
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Special thanks to our generous sponsors for supporting the National Homelessness Law Center’s mission to prevent and end homelessness in America.

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About the National Homelessness Law Center

The National Homelessness Law Center (the Law Center) is a national organization dedicated 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.

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