

UPR INFO PRE-SESSION BRIEFING:
CRIMINALIZATION OF POVERTY TESTIMONY

August 25, 2026

Speaker: Amanda Richer (o/b/o National Homelessness Law Center)

I. Introduction

Good [morning/afternoon], Mr. President, Excellencies, and Distinguished Delegates. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Amanda Richer and I am honored to be here on behalf of the National Homelessness Law Center and a U.S. civil society coalition working to end the criminalization of poverty and ensuring the equal rights and dignity of all people. I am also a lived expert of these same systemic, social ills. As a disabled woman with a long history of surviving many types of abuse and traumatic brain injuries, I escaped domestic violence to find myself, not surprisingly, unsheltered under a bridge in Seattle, Washington. There, I and my immediate community of other survivors, persons with disabilities, trans people, people who were in foster care, and other impacted groups were met not with support, but with condemnation by Seattle authorities who destroyed our site. Tents were slashed open with box cutters. Whatever we couldn't physically carry in the time allotted was bulldozed and trashed without our permission. Cooking materials, medications, and identity documents were taken away. As a direct result, people scattered. Some hid, as I did. Some disappeared. Some relapsed. Some even died. While I was later housed through a Housing First Program, I recognize that many others were far less fortunate. I carry their humanity with me through my testimony, as millions of us in the U.S. experience government threats to our housing, healthcare, and ability to survive.

II. Presentation of Issues

a. Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

First, to the issue of homelessness criminalization and housing insecurity, the Trump administration has made a pre-existing crisis so much worse for communities of color and poor residents from coast to coast. In July 2025, President Trump's Executive Order 14321 began directing federal agencies to use their funding and policymaking power to disappear unhoused people from the streets through rigid camping bans and involuntary commitments, and end life-saving harm reduction services. Federal agencies were allowed to restrict funding applications for homeless service providers, qualifying their funding eligibility on their discrimination against trans persons and shifting people out of permanent supportive housing into transitional housing or even shelters or camps. While courts ruled against these restrictions, the Administration continued its systematic plan of attack against unhoused people by sending federal law enforcement and National Guard troops into the streets of Washington, D.C. to violently clear homeless encampments rather than simply housing DC residents in need of a safe home.

Moreover, since the 2024 devastating U.S. Supreme Court decision that allowed for the ticketing and arresting of unhoused people with nowhere else to go, over 330 states, cities and towns nationwide have passed laws criminalizing life-sustaining behaviors like sleeping and sheltering

in public. Relatedly, unhoused people are criminalized for public bathing and public urination in the absence of safe, sanitary public bathroom facilities, and in at least one case in New Mexico, were threatened for peaceful food sharing without a public permit.

Enhanced immigration enforcement has further destabilized tenants and shelter residents alike by exploiting their poverty. As one example, federal regulatory changes like the Mixed-Status Rule and Public Charge Rule are pushing families with mixed immigration status out of publicly funded housing. As another example, migrant families who risk deportation merely by sending their children to school have been left with no choice but to shelter at home. In states like Minnesota with high ICE presence, this has impacted school attendance rates for multilingual students and students of color and kept working families from earning enough daily wages to pay for food, rent, utilities, medicines, and other essential needs. And in a third example, armed federal ICE raids of homeless shelters in cities like New York and Chicago have fueled family separation, violated individuals and families' sensitive information and use of private space, and, in some instances, triggered unlawful deportations.

New work requirements and time limits on benefits are threatening to force mostly disabled and older populations out of their subsidized housing. Unhoused veterans, too, are at risk of losing their civil liberties, including the right to control their finances and decide where to live, as a new program is attempting to place them more easily into legal guardianships.

These federal and other governmental actions contradict prior recommendations from Cuba, Ethiopia, Malta, and others calling to decriminalize poverty and invest in dignified housing.

b. Food and Water Insecurity

Second, to the issue of food and water insecurity, the Trump administration made unprecedented cuts to nutritional assistance, Medicaid, other essential benefits, and public health programs.

Its July 2025 'One Big Beautiful Bill' created a dent in the safety net of nearly 42 million people, who already struggled to make ends meet during an ongoing housing affordability and eviction crisis. It also limited food access and public benefits for a number of vulnerable groups. Many lawful immigrants, including refugees, survivors of sex trafficking and domestic violence, and asylum-seekers who were otherwise eligible for these federal entitlements will no longer be eligible, while many older and chronically ill people will struggle to meet more stringent work requirements to qualify for them. Meanwhile, farmers and local grocers will experience devastating revenue losses, straining small businesses—especially those in lower-income communities—that provide sustainable food sources to their own local communities.

The labor of over 2 million farmworkers is additionally threatened by rising environmental concerns and the absence of federal efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. The Trump administration's increased privatization of the food industry has increased risks to clean and healthy soil, air, and waterways, while failing to curb harmful pesticides and other toxins into food systems. Relatedly, the lack of water infrastructural development has left poor and predominantly Black and brown residents across the deep South and Midwest with a lack of

basic sanitation and affordable water services. Deleterious health hazards have erupted across many of these same communities.

These consequential federal spending cuts and increased immigration enforcement on food insecure families undermine prior recommendations from Azerbaijan, Cuba, and other member states calling to reverse high rates of poverty and inequality and improve sanitation and water infrastructure.

III. Conclusion & Recommendations

These accounts evidence the U.S.'s political failings to advance inclusive, compassionate solutions to poverty. Among other interventions in our UPR submissions, we urgently call for the U.S. to:

1. Abolish laws and policies that punish and criminalize unhoused people, including the use of involuntary commitment;
2. Recognize and implement housing that is accessible, affordable, habitable, well-located, and culturally adequate; and
3. Suspend immigration enforcement in and around schools, hospitals, food assistance sites, and faith-based institutions, and establish non-custodial alternatives to immigration detention, particularly for children, families and others in vulnerable situations.

Thank you.