

# NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

## 2007 Successes

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) serves as the legal arm of the movement to end homelessness and poverty in America. NLCHP's work achieves concrete benefits for homeless men, women, and children across the country. As 2007 comes to an end, here are highlights of NLCHP achievements over the past year.

### Pushing Congress to End Homelessness

- NLCHP organized a campaign to recognize the **20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** – the first and still only federal legislation addressing homelessness – and to push Congress to do more to end homelessness. As a result the **House of Representatives passed Resolution 561** calling on Congress to fulfill its 20 year old promise to enact long-term solutions to homelessness, including increasing affordable housing and homeless assistance.
- NLCHP helped draft and advocated for the **Homelessness Emergency and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act (H.R. 840)**, which reauthorizes the McKinney-Vento Act, substantially **increases current funding** levels for McKinney-sponsored programs and **expands eligibility** for assistance. On October 4, NLCHP testified at a Congressional hearing in support of the bill.

### Protecting Civil Rights

- As a result of NLCHP advocacy, **Fort Myers, Florida** rejected a proposed ordinance that would have placed severe restrictions on groups sharing food in public parks, and **Lexington, Kentucky repealed** part of its severely restrictive anti-begging law.
- In **Las Vegas**, NLCHP helped local attorneys challenge a law prohibiting sharing food with “indigent” people in public spaces, winning a court order to stop enforcement of the law.
- NLCHP filed a lawsuit against the City of **Dallas** to challenge its food sharing restrictions. While the lawsuit is pending, local groups have been allowed to continue feeding homeless people.
- NLCHP and local partners won passage of a bill in the **Maryland Senate** that includes **homelessness as a protected class under Maryland's hate crimes statute**.

### Promoting the Human Right to Housing

- On November 5, NLCHP held the **4th Annual Human Right to Housing Forum**, which connected nearly 200 housing and human rights advocates, lawyers, and service providers from across the country via nationwide videoconference in five cities: Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New Orleans, and Washington, DC.
- The Forum resulted in increased **international and domestic advocacy** for those fighting the destruction of public housing in New Orleans; improved understanding of local strategies; strengthened solidarity in the national movement for the human right to housing; and the formation of local coalitions to fight for the right to housing in their communities.

- NLCHP held regional trainings on the Right to Housing in Florida and Minnesota. Each training attracted over 200 participants and led to new coalitions to advocate in their communities.

### Helping the Gulf Coast

- NLCHP and allies won a court order requiring the **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** to stop its unlawful termination of housing assistance to tens of thousands of low-income individuals made homeless by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
- NLCHP helped create a **human rights coalition to protect housing rights in the Gulf Coast**.

### Improving Access to Education for Children & Youth

- NLCHP and its coalition partners won passage by Congress of the **Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007**. NLCHP successfully advocated for provisions in the 2007 Act giving homeless children priority for enrollment and decreasing barriers to enrollment.
- NLCHP successfully fought to include provisions to help homeless children in both the **Homeless Education Improvement Act of 2007** and the **No Child Left Behind Act** reauthorization bill; NLCHP is now pushing Congress to pass both bills.

### Protecting Survivors of Domestic Violence

- NLCHP won new legislation in the **D.C. Council** to protect victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, rape or stalking from eviction and housing discrimination and to prevent homelessness. NLCHP helped get similar legislation introduced in the **Massachusetts State Senate**.
- NLCHP held a series of trainings entitled “**Improving Housing and School Stability for Domestic Violence Survivors and Their Children**”—to educate grassroots groups and lawyers about the law—and is working with participants to correct non-compliance in their communities.

### Increasing Housing and Services to Help Homeless People

- NLCHP’s technical assistance enabled the Montgomery Coalition for the Homeless to file an application for **surplus federal property** in Maryland, and helped a group in **New York City** obtain surplus property to use as housing for homeless families.
- NLCHP has helped numerous groups around the country obtain **free base closure and surplus federal property** under the Base Closure and Homeless Assistance Act of 1994. To date, **143 homeless assistance organizations** have applied to convert at least **45 unused military bases** to housing and services for homeless people.
- NLCHP produced and distributed a toolkit—with model forms and letters, and examples of successful programs—to help **over 4000 local organizations and individuals** across the country apply for surplus property. NLCHP conducted trainings on how to use the toolkit for over 65 organizations, and helped 16 groups secure pro bono legal assistance, navigate the complex application process, and develop the skills needed to successfully apply for the property.