



I. Overview

On June 27, 2018 more than 150 advocates, attorneys, currently and formerly homeless individuals, funders, and government representatives, from over 100 organizations and 30 states gathered in Washington, D.C. for the annual National Forum on the Human Right to Housing organized by the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#). This year, the Forum's focus was on the [Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign](#) (HNL Campaign), to strategically advance our collective work *against* criminalization of homelessness and *for* housing. The Forum was designed to draw on the resources that each participant brought to the table and to help create new ones. The event provided the opportunity to 1) share victories and challenges, 2) discuss the human right to housing, and 3) define obstacles, share tools, and strategize for future advocacy.

The 2018 Forum was generously hosted by [Sidley Austin LLP](#) and sponsored by [Fish & Richardson PC](#), [Perkins Coie LLP](#), [Microsoft Corporation](#) and [United Airlines](#). Thanks to these sponsors and those who contributed through their registration purchases, the Law Center was able to award more than twenty travel scholarships, along with dozens more free registrations, to enable the participation of currently and formerly homeless individuals in the discussions. The event was developed with the assistance of a planning committee of advocates and formerly homeless individuals.

Photos from the event are located on [the 2018 National Forum on the Human Right to Housing Facebook page](#), and Facebook Live videos are located on the [Law Center's Facebook page](#).

I. Background: the Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign

Across the country, cities are criminalizing homelessness, making it illegal for people to sit, sleep, and even eat in public places—despite the lack of affordable housing and other basic resources. Communities of color, mentally and physically disabled persons, and LGBT youth, already disproportionately affected by homelessness, are further marginalized: getting a job, housing, or public benefits is even more challenging with an arrest record. These laws and policies violate rights, harm vulnerable people, reinforce cycles of poverty, and do not work.



Housing *does* work—it solves the problem of homelessness for those most directly affected, and for cities concerned about their public places. It is cost effective: housing homeless people costs less than criminalizing them and is more effective in the long term at the end goal of getting people out of poverty and into self-sufficiency. Ensuring adequate housing not only can help end homelessness but will also prevent homelessness for those who are vulnerable. In order to change these policies, the Law Center, together with the National Coalition for the Homeless and more than 100 allies working on these issues at the local, state, and federal levels, launched a Campaign for Housing Not Handcuffs in November 2016. The Campaign now has close to 700 endorsements from key partners such as public officials, advocacy organizations, criminal justice professionals, grassroots activists, and individuals who support the cause.

II. Sharing Victories and Challenges

The Forum benefitted from a pre-opening special session where advocate and filmmaker **P.J. D'Amico** of the Buck Foundation shared his upcoming project, [Move Along to Where?](#), highlighting transformative power of tiny home communities in building not only shelters, but organizing bases.

The Forum was officially opened with remarks from **Paul Zidlicky**, Pro Bono Counsel at Sidley Austin; **Robert Warren**, director of People for Fairness Coalition in DC and a

member of the Law Center's Board; and **Maria Foscarinis**, founder and executive director of the Law Center. The speakers highlighted the importance of including voices from those who are currently or have formerly faced homelessness in panels and discussions, bringing together different networks, and holding inclusive, participatory workshops. The Law Center was able to provide scholarships to more than 90% of applicants, ensuring this inclusive environment.



Maria Foscarinis, founder and executive director of the Law Center, welcoming forum participants

The first plenary, moderated by the Law Center's Senior Attorney **Eric Tars**, highlighted some important victories (and ongoing challenges) in the fight for Housing Not Handcuffs from the past year. Attorney **Carol Sobel** spoke about the litigation in Orange County, CA that stopped a planned sweep of an 800-person homeless encampment until the county provided alternative shelter and has resulted in a voluntary commitment to permanent supportive housing including 2,700 units over 7 years. **Randy Dillard** of [RTCNYC Coalition](#) described the successful fight for a right to counsel in housing court in New York City, led by directly affected tenants. **Mo George** from [Picture the Homeless](#) shared how members of the organization worked tirelessly to ensure that Housing Not Warehousing bills in New York City, that will help put vacant properties to use as housing, were passed. **Mary Van Cleve** of [Columbia Legal Services](#) shared two victories, including the Homeless Student Stability Act which helps protect homeless students' access to education in Washington State and the decision in *City of Seattle v. Long*, which is being appealed but achieved the right to live in a car without being towed. Several forum attendees also took the opportunity to share victories and steps in the right direction!



Opening panelists Mo George, Mary Van Cleve, Randy Dillard, Carol Sobel, and Eric Tars

III. Discussing the Human Right to Housing

The second plenary focused on discussing how advocates could tailor their messaging around homelessness, housing, and criminal justice to resonate with different audiences to help promote constructive housing and service policies over criminalization of homelessness. Panelists **Wendell M. France, Sr.** of [MD Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services](#) and Retired Major of the [Baltimore Police Department](#), **Linda Kaufmann** of [DC Business Improvement District](#), **Rob Robinson** of [New York City Coalition on the Continuum of Care](#), and **Heidi Wegleitner** of [Dane County Board of Supervisors](#) recognized the need to demonstrate that housing is a human right by amplifying the voices of individuals who have experienced homelessness. Participants discussed other approaches including: appealing to economic interests by explaining how much money the system of homelessness costs, highlighting successes of the housing movement to show that it is not impossible to solve the problem, combining hard data with personal narratives, and fighting myths about homelessness by explaining its true causes.



Keynote Speaker Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Adequate Housing

Our Keynote Speaker, [UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Adequate Housing](#) **Leilani Farha**, inspired our participants with her powerful words about the human right to

housing. Farha argued that we need to #MakeTheShift to see that “housing is a human right, not a commodity” and that “when governments take action to divest people of their humanity, they strike at the heart of human rights.”

III. Defining Obstacles, Sharing Tools, and Strategizing for Future Advocacy

The Forum held breakout sessions in the afternoon that covered the following topics:

- **Panhandling** with **Maggie Ardiente, Bob Erlenbusch, Amy Horton-Newell, Michelle Movahed, Eric Tars, and Jocelyn Tillisch**. In this session, participants discussed the current state of the law around panhandling ordinances and brainstormed ideas for a new strategic campaign to try to get as many of these ordinances struck down as possible.
- **Encampments** with **Tristia Bauman, Paul Boden, Evanie Parr, and Carol Sobel**. During this session, forum attendees discussed long-term solutions to homelessness for people living in encampments including what is working, what is not working, and what could be done better. Attendees also had a conversation about securing rights and protections for those living in encampments.
- **Renters’ Rights** with **Randy Dillard, Eric Dunn, Janet Hostetler, and Tony Romano**. Participants in this session had conversations about how to strengthen the link between renters’ rights and homelessness prevention. They identified existing and needed resources, areas that need to be researched further, and possible solutions.
- **Youth Roundtable** facilitated by **Michael Santos**. During this session, young people and youth advocates discussed the laws, policies, systems, and environments at the local, state, and federal levels that affect youth experiencing homelessness in different ways. Participants brainstormed ways to close information gaps between homeless youth and non-profit organizations, to improve provision of services and resources, especially for those who age out of different youth systems, and to facilitate systemic and program interactions.



Participants in the Renters’ Rights Breakout Session

IV. Next Steps

Each breakout group created a list of concrete next steps, requiring action from both the Law Center and the many organizations the attendees represented.

Panhandling

- Develop an awareness campaign using social media to debunk the myths surrounding panhandling
- Provide media tools and templates that people and organizations can use to support this campaign
- Create a demand letter template to send to cities that have or are considering unconstitutional panhandling ordinances

Encampments

- Work with neighborhood associations, local businesses, non-profit organizations, etc. to legitimize the power of encampments and foster local support to unite against police sweeps
- Ensure that shelters meet the holistic needs of those who use them, have fewer barriers to entry, and are ADA compliant
- Stop the flow into encampments through increased renters' rights

Renters' Rights

- Create a Renters' Rights Handbook that is easily accessible to tenants
- Fight for the right to counsel in all cities and states
- Work to prohibit rental application fees
- Require landlords to have written admission policies that are made available to applicants and require written notice of reasons for the denial of rental applications

Youth Roundtable

- Create informational campaigns for youth so they know their rights and the services available to them
- Incorporate the voices of youth by including them on advisory boards of organizations that work to end homelessness

V. Feedback



Forum participants share their commitment to shortening, preventing, and ending homelessness

We received very positive feedback from attendees through our post-event survey:

"It was incredibly informative and affirming to connect with folks doing similar work with shared passion from lots of different communities and perspectives."

"It was a good opportunity to speak and hear input on action items from people in a variety of different roles."

VI. Keep the Conversation Going

We encourage people to continue the conversation online via the HNH Campaign listserv (join by endorsing at [housingnothandcuffs.org](https://www.facebook.com/HousingNotHandcuffs/)) and the HNH Campaign's social media platforms below:

-  <https://www.facebook.com/HousingNotHandcuffs/>
-  #HNHNow @HNHCampaign
-  #Right2HousingForum

VII. Conclusion

The Law Center will work to achieve the above next steps that require national tools, resources, and coordination. At the same time all the Forum attendees, and the HNH Campaign participants who could not attend, should review the above lists and see what steps they can take individually to help move the collective goals of the Campaign forward in their own spheres of advocacy, and reach out to us at the Law Center as you need help.

Together, we can stop the criminalization of homelessness, and ensure the human right to housing for all!



Forum participants at the evening reception