

IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws, Changing Lives

April 2016

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Dear Friends,

Fair housing, no housing, and inequality is...

No, this isn't a typo or bad grammar. It's the convergence of three key themes.

April is fair housing month, **but how can housing be "fair" when you don't have any? Or when "your" housing is someone else's kitchen floor or couch, offered as emergency help? Or a shelter, car, or park, where you can be ticketed or arrested at any time simply for falling asleep?**



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

In fact, fair housing is very relevant even to people without housing. Discrimination plays a role in driving homelessness, erecting barriers to housing based on protected classes like race, disability - or its proxies such as holding a housing voucher or a welfare check or having a history of eviction. It plays a far reaching role in education quality, employment options, and income.

These barriers keep already poor people from opportunity, perpetuating inequality - and can drive them further into poverty and isolation. In a terrible paradox, blanket bars to housing based on criminal records can mean that someone arrested for sleeping outside can be barred in the future from finding housing because of the conviction, leading them to continue to sleep outside.

The good news is that our collective advocacy is making an impact. [HUD's new guidance](#) begins to lower **the overbroad use of criminal records in screening tenants in violation of the Fair Housing Act**. We also have [new federal policies](#) to fight the criminalization of homelessness - and they are already starting to have an [impact at the local level](#). The U.S. Department of Justice has called criminally punishing people for the most extreme poverty - sleeping outside because [they have no place to live](#) – so unfair that it is “[cruel and unusual](#)” and thus unconstitutional, and some cities have already followed its urging to stop the practice. The Supreme Court's ruling on solicitation in [Reed v. Town of Gilbert](#), followed by the federal appeals court ruling in [our case applying it to begging](#) solidified rights and had an immediate impact in [cities and courts across the country](#).

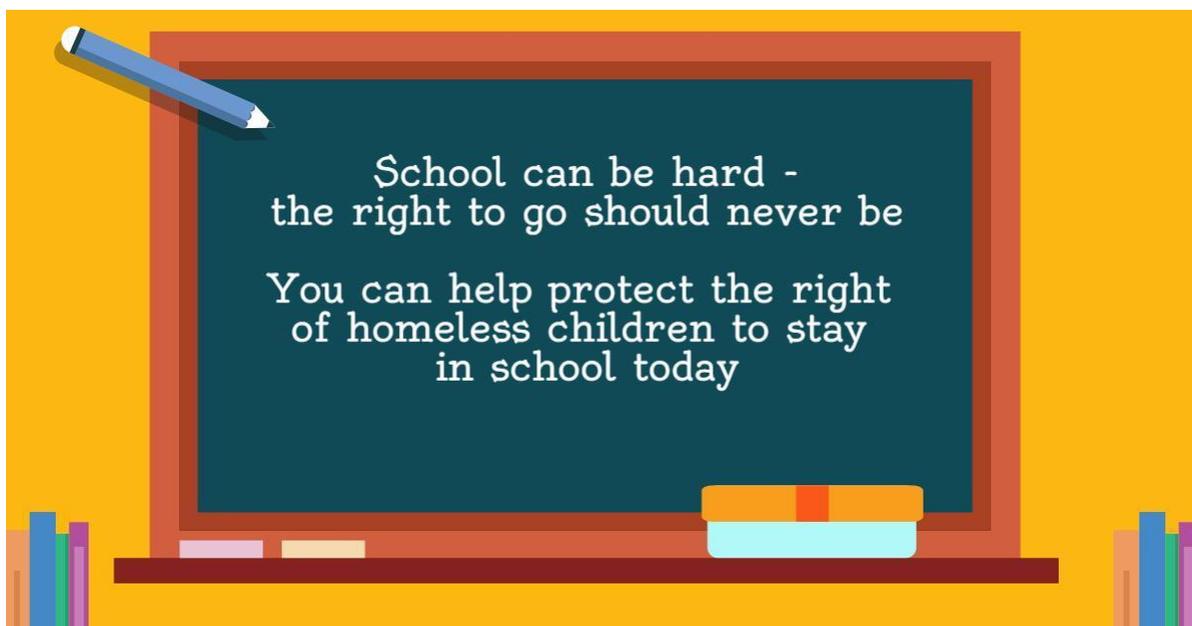
And the Ford Foundation's [#InequalityIs](#) campaign is yielding a vibrant discussion about what inequality looks like today. Check out [our contributions](#). Its leadership and commitment of resources can help continue and build this momentum.

So that someday our tag line will be - together, we're winning.

Getting the Justice Department on Your Side: A Guide to Filing a Complaint

The Law Center is publishing a [fact sheet](#) on how to file a complaint to the U.S. Department of Justice about local policies or practices that criminalize homelessness. You need not be an attorney to file a complaint, and this fact sheet provides some helpful tips to those looking to get the Justice Department on your side.

Check it out and help spread it to others! Thanks to Sullivan & Cromwell for developing this fact sheet and to the Department of Justice and other partners who provided input!



This Spring we ask you to help families with children, like the Jones:

The Jones family became homeless after a devastating fire in their home. This misfortune – coupled with a lack of financial resources – pushed them into homelessness. Then on top of that, the children’s school barred them from attending classes, stating that the family had chosen to move out of the school district – rather than being forced out by homelessness. The Law Center stepped in to help protect the children’s rights, after which the school changed its position and allowed them to stay.

Every day, thousands of Americans like the Joneses are affected by homelessness. The rights of homeless children are often violated, sometimes due to lack of awareness by school administrators, **leaving children and their families unprotected**. That’s where the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty comes in. **The Law Center works to protect the education rights of homeless children and youth, as well as the housing and civil rights of people who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness.**

Read more about the Jones family and the Law Center’s 2015 victories for children experiencing homelessness in [my recent letter](#).

Will you give a donation of [\\$1,000](#), [\\$500](#), [\\$250](#), [\\$100](#), or [another amount](#), to support the Law Center’s critical work?

Thank you for your partnership, and for ensuring homeless children not only remain in school but also have access to the services they need.

Lawsuits tell California Cities to Clean Up their Act: Stop Throwing Away People's Property

Last month, Carmen Nunez and Kelly Wilcox sued the city of Pomona, CA for taking their mothers' ashes and throwing them away. Their property and dignity were destroyed when the city “swept” the homeless encampments where they lived. The past month has brought increased reports of cities sweeping homeless encampments across the country, and legal organizations are playing an important role in challenging the legality of policies that criminalize homelessness.

Four residents of skid row sued the City of Los Angeles for violating due process when confiscating and destroying property, and arresting homeless people. This isn't the first time [LA has been sued](#) and this month a federal judge [granted a partial injunction](#) on the city's actions. But the City Council responded with new legislation that [further limits the property rights](#) of people experiencing homelessness. Carmen Nunez's and Kelly Wilcox's recent lawsuit against Pomona was also filed on due process grounds **and within a few weeks was reached to respect homeless persons' constitutional rights.** Farther north in Salinas, CA, a federal judge denied a preliminary injunction and, as a result, the city conducted massive sweeps affecting over 200 homeless people. In all cases, the property at stake protects homeless people from the elements, provides essential medical care and provides access to benefits they are entitled to. Without this property, an individual's physical and mental health deteriorates, trapping them in homelessness longer.

The Law Center is working with over 100 advocates and legal organizations across the nation to develop a campaign redirecting law and policy from supporting criminalization and towards supporting housing, which we expect to launch formally later this year. To learn more about joining this groundswell movement, contact Jason Stone (jstone@nlchp.org). Any legal organizations interested in working on litigation strategy around criminalization should contact Law Center Senior Attorney Tristia Bauman (tbauman@nlchp.org).



We're Hiring!

Interested in making a difference? Join our team!

The Law Center is currently looking to fill 2 positions:

Administrative Manager: we are looking to hire someone responsible for administrative management, including human resources and financial oversight. The ideal candidate will have at least 3 years of experience in administration at a small, progressive non-profit. Details [here](#).

Volunteer Attorney (Pro Bono projects): we are looking for a part time (15-25 hours/week) volunteer attorney to help develop, maintain, and oversee our large program of pro bono legal projects. It will be a great opportunity to oversee innovative legal work involving homelessness, housing, poverty, and education projects, work directly with attorney volunteers at major law firms and corporate legal departments. Details [here](#).

We look forward to hearing from you!

Welcome to Our Newest Team Members!

The Law Center is fortunate to welcome our newest team members, here for varying lengths of time - one year, six months, and a semester. We are pleased to introduce you to three volunteers, Linaise, Jason, and Jenifer from the [AmeriCorps VISTA program](#), a national service program designed to fight poverty; Dani is an [Emerson Fellow](#), a social justice program that trains, inspires, and sustains leaders; Tai is a student intern through the [University of California Washington Center](#). Learn more about them below!

AmeriCorps VISTA - Linaise Lima

"As a Development and Communications VISTA, I provide support for the development and communications team to advance the work of the Law Center to end the criminalization of homelessness and work for solutions like housing first and affordable housing. I am excited to be at the Law Center because we are working to create solutions to end and prevent homelessness and I want to be part of that solution."

Prior to joining the AmeriCorps VISTA program, Linaise worked at a nonprofit health plan in Medford, Massachusetts assisting low-income individuals and families. Linaise has a strong interest in social justice and has also volunteered at her local



homeless shelter and food pantries. Linaise holds a B.S. in Journalism from Florida A&M University.

AmeriCorps VISTA - Jason Stone

"As the Advocacy Networks VISTA, I assist in coordinating our campaign work and facilitating partnerships between the various stakeholders. I am excited to be part of an organization that works for such an under served segment of our population and am eager to contribute however I can in providing individuals experiencing homelessness with the support that they deserve."



Prior to joining the Law Center, Jason served as a VISTA with the American Legion Auxiliary. In this role he developed campaigns to raise awareness of, and promote action to address, the issues facing military and veteran communities. Jason also worked on grassroots campaign for organizations such as Rock the Vote and UNICEF. He regularly volunteers with Higher Achievement, tutoring under served students in the DC area, and serves with the advocacy committee of the AmeriCorps Alums DC Chapter. He holds a B.A. in International Development from the University of California- Los Angeles.

AmeriCorps VISTA - Jenifer Brewer

"As the Data Management VISTA, I will be building and managing a database for the Law Center. I am excited to be a part of the Law Center's mission and look forward to contributing my part to ending homelessness and poverty."

Before joining AmeriCorps and taking up the Law Center position, Jenifer had interned both at Bread for the World and the Bureau of International Information Programs in the Department of State. Jenifer's interest in social justice started at a young age where she was an active Girl Scout, which encouraged her to be engaged in community and volunteer service to this day. Jenifer graduated with a B.A. in Communications from the University of California Los Angeles.



Emerson National Hunger Fellow - Dani Gilmour

"I used to believe that homelessness and poverty were the result of an individual's bad choices, and not *my* problems. I equated a person's worth with their ability to "make it" in society because I felt if they could not pay for human needs, it was their fault. This ignores the reality that our political, social and economic systems determine opportunity. Homelessness and poverty are absolutely my problems because their existence is proof that true opportunity is not provided to all, and the world's progress is stifled in return. I am working towards a system and society that thrive!"



Dani's B.A. is in Community, Environment and Planning from the University of Washington. Their focus was in food systems, nutrition and agricultural policy.

Intern - Tai Kang

"Homelessness is a national crisis that is often forgotten and overlooked. In our nation today, we live in a system that targets and systematically disadvantages people experiencing homelessness. As a Development and Communications Intern, it is my responsibility to assist with publicity, events, outreach, and enhance media coverage with the development and communications team, and to help advocate for the millions of lives of homeless and poor Americans."



Tai is a third year sociology student at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB). He is also a student intern through the University of California Washington Center. Tai was inspired to intern for a non-profit dedicated to enriching the lives of the less fortunate through his volunteer service and role as the Internal Chair of the Isla Vista Community Relations Committee at UCSB.

Changing Laws. Changing Lives.

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (the Law Center) is the only national organization dedicated solely 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.

www.nlchp.org