

# IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

**NATIONAL LAW CENTER  
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY**



**Lawyers Working to  
End Homelessness**

**News and Commentary for  
February 2013**

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## **STAY IN TOUCH**



## **GET THE FACTS**

Review our recent  
webinar on protecting  
renters from becoming  
homeless!

Check out our report to  
the United Nations on  
the criminalization of  
homelessness and  
human rights!

### **Dear Friends:**

Musing over the definition of home, a character in one of Robert Frost's poems says:

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in.  
I should have called it  
Something you somehow haven't to  
deserve."

To my mind, Frost's description connotes  
belonging, community, a sense of place --  
and a place you have a right to be. And, once  
you're there, you cannot be thrown out for no  
reason, on a moment's notice, through no  
fault of your own.

In less poetic terms, these are elements of  
the human right to housing.

Today, millions of people lack that fundamental right: a place  
where they have to let you in. Millions are homeless -- living on  
the street or in shelters. Many more have lost their own homes  
and are doubled-up with friends or relatives. Yet funding for  
federal housing assistance has been cut so deeply that right now  
only 25 percent of Americans poor enough to qualify actually  
receive it.



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## Criminalization of Homelessness Has Serious Human Rights Implications

In partnership with the Yale Law School Lowenstein Human Rights Clinic and UC Irvine Human Rights Clinic, the Law Center has submitted a report to the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) as it prepares for its review of U.S. compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights later this year.



The report focuses on the criminalization of homelessness, which UN experts have said may violate protections against cruel, inhuman[e], and degrading treatment. Even the [U.S. government acknowledged](#) in 2012 -- for the first time in history -- that this practice may violate Americans' human rights under the Covenant and other treaties.

In preparation for its review, the UN Human Rights Committee will soon adopt a list of key issues that the U.S. must address when it formally reports on its compliance with the Covenant in October. The Law Center will continue to push the Committee and the U.S. to acknowledge and address the criminalization of homelessness as part of this process, including coordinating a more in-depth shadow report in the coming months.

For more information, or to get involved, please contact Law Center Human Rights Program Director [Eric Tars](#).

## Show Your Support for the National Housing Trust Fund

The Law Center firmly believes we all have a human right to safe, affordable housing -- a position the U.S. government has supported through international treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Unfortunately, our country has failed so far to make that right a reality.

The shortage of affordable rental housing remains at unconscionable levels. For the 6.8 million American households for whom even a modest rental home is unaffordable and unavailable, life is a daily struggle for survival. Fortunately, there is a solution that will move us towards ending America's homelessness and affordable housing crisis: the [National Housing Trust Fund](#) (NHTF).

Advocates achieved a significant victory in 2008 when the NHTF was established, thanks to the support and advocacy of thousands of endorsing organizations nationwide. Now, your help is needed to take the next critical step: to get the NHTF funded. The Law Center is working with the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) and a large coalition of other organizations to support this effort. We think funding the NHTF is so important that we have made this effort a top policy priority for 2013. As our partner, we hope



you will join us in this effort.

We are pleased to share with you NLIHC's proposal to fund the NHTF with resources from mortgage interest tax reform. The plan will expand tax benefits to middle and low income homeowners and redirect funds to the NHTF. We urge your organization to join us and endorse it now!

[Click here to read more.](#)

## Houston Conference Advances Rights of Homeless Youth

On January 25, Law Center Director of Human Rights & Children's Rights Programs Eric Tars gave the keynote address at the Educational Forum on Homeless Youth in Houston, Texas, hosted by [One Voice Texas](#) (OVT). He educated participants about the rights of homeless youth in Texas, shared best practices from other states, and provided direction in their campaign to revise laws and policies to better meet these young people's needs.



Lillian Aguirre Ortiz, Director of Behavioral Health Policy and Government Relations for OVT, contacted the Law Center following our publication of *Alone Without A Home: A State-By-State Review of Laws Affecting Unaccompanied Homeless Youth*.

"We can't thank the Law Center enough for sharing its expertise in this area," Aguirre Ortiz said following the forum, noting that the knowledge shared by the Law Center and other groups will be critical to OVT and its partners as they develop short and long-term plans to "lead [the] community toward strategic, effective, and concrete solutions that meet the needs of our homeless youth."

Tars' keynote followed an opening address by Houston Mayor Annise Parker, who spoke passionately of her personal commitment to ending homelessness, inspired in part by her adoption of a youth who had been kicked out of his home. She called on the entire community to work collaboratively to address the needs of homeless youth, pledging the support of the mayor's office.

## About the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

The Law Center is the only national legal advocacy organization dedicated to ending and preventing homelessness in America. It fights in the halls of power for laws and policies that protect homeless people's rights and help them rise out of poverty.

[www.nlchp.org](http://www.nlchp.org)