

IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws,
Changing Lives

News and Commentary for
September 2014

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Read Maria's new
[Huffington Post article about discrimination and the criminalization](#)

Dear Friends,

Later this month, at our McKinney-Vento Awards event, we'll also be marking our 25th anniversary. I'm excited about our incredible honorees and generous sponsors, and encourage you to [read about them](#). And, if you can, [please support and join us](#).

I've also been reflecting on our impact. Homelessness affects and threatens way too many Americans. But step-by-step we are building a legal and policy foundation to protect rights and to advance real solutions. A few highlights:

We're moving forward in our work to **shift laws and policies away from criminalizing homelessness to [solving it](#)**. We've won court cases, supported [state and local advocates](#), and even [appealed to the United Nations](#). Now we're getting traction with the federal government - following a major federal report, [Searching out Solutions](#), accepting our recommendations - and working to put teeth into them.

We're winning important new housing rights to **prevent people from becoming homeless**. We've won [new protections for domestic violence survivors](#), addressing a major cause of homelessness for women, now covering **over 4 million households**. We've won federal protections for [tenants living in foreclosed properties](#) - to protect these vulnerable tenants from becoming homeless.



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

of poverty

Check out our Latest
Reports:
No Safe Place
&
CERD Housing
Report

We've been to [court repeatedly](#) to enforce the rights of service providers to use **vacant federal properties**, at no cost, to [house and serve homeless people](#), helping **over 2 million people** annually. And we've led the campaign for the **human right to housing [here at home](#)** - spurring new laws and policies in communities across the country.

We've won important education rights for [homeless children](#) - ensuring they can stay in school, have immediate access to free meals, enroll in gifted and special education programs, and participate in sports and other extracurricular programs. We've won major, precedent-setting court cases, worked in congress to strengthen the law, and trained providers, parents, lawyers and educators. **Over 1 million schoolchildren** are now homeless - we are giving them a chance to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty.

We still have much to do. Our vision is of a future where everyone has a place to call home - where housing is a right, not a privilege. Where no one has to be homeless. Step-by-step, we are working towards that goal.

We can't do it alone. In whatever way you can, [please join us](#). Together we will get there.

McKinney-Vento Awards



September 30th Will Be the 16th Annual Awards Event!

This year will be our 16th annual [McKinney-Vento Awards event](#)! This year's event is especially important to us as it marks our 25th anniversary, and we will celebrate 25 years of high impact advocacy that has changed laws and changed lives for millions. The event raises critical resources to support our work.

This year, we are thrilled to honor:

Steve Smith Sr., wide receiver for the Baltimore Ravens, with the Stewart B. McKinney Award, for his commitment to homeless and low-income children. His foundation is dedicated to strengthening families across America by helping victims of domestic violence and investing in the health and wellness of children. **Senator Patty Murray** with the Bruce F. Vento Award, for her consistent leadership in the Senate in implementing policies and providing funding for programs to help those facing homelessness. **Sidley Austin LLP**, a Law Firm widely recognized for its pro bono and diversity programs, with the Pro Bono Counsel Award. **Aleah Green** with the Personal Achievement Award for her courage and persistence, leading her to seek out the help of the Law Center when her rights were being diminished. The McKinney-Vento Awards will be at the Liaison Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. with emcee Scott Thuman, an Emmy-award winning, Senior Political Reporter covering the White

House and Capitol Hill for ABC7 News and News Channel 8.

We hope to see you there! For more information, click [here](#).

The Decriminalization of Homelessness Gains Global and Local Ground

U.N. Racial Discrimination Committee Calls for U.S. to Abolish Criminalization of Homelessness, Eugene Mayor Calls for Local Implementation

Following a [report](#) submitted to the U.N. [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) by the Law Center, and our advocacy in Geneva, the Committee called for the U.S. to "abolish laws and policies making homelessness a crime" and to "offer incentives to decriminalize homelessness, including by providing financial support to local authorities that implement alternatives to criminalization, and withdrawing funding from local authorities that criminalize homelessness".

The Committee's statement is part of its [Concluding Observations](#), following a two day review of U.S. government compliance with the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), a treaty ratified by the U.S. in 1994. During the hearings, several Committee members raised the issue of criminalization of homelessness, and the Observations stated the Committee is "concerned at the high number of homeless persons, who are disproportionately from racial and ethnic minorities ... and at the criminalization of homelessness through laws that prohibit activities such as loitering, camping, begging, and lying in public spaces". The Committee also included criminalization of homelessness among four issues of specific concern the U.S. must report back to the Committee on during its next review, scheduled for 2017.

The Law Center generated significant media attention for the Committee's Concluding Recommendations, including articles on the [InterPress](#) and [MintPress](#) news services and an [interview](#) on KPFA radio.



Photo by Eric Bridiers

Complementing this success, following ongoing advocacy by the Law Center and [Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute](#) as part of the [Human Rights at Home Campaign](#), and local partners, Mayor Kitty Piercy of Eugene, OR, published an [article](#) in the *U.S. Mayors* magazine promoting the use of international human rights standards, including those found in the Racial Discrimination treaty, to craft local policy. Mayor Piercy specifically addressed homelessness among the issues human rights standards could help on.

The Law Center recently raised concerns about Eugene's enforcement of anti-camping ordinances and other ordinances under consideration in a letter to its policymakers, and hopes the Mayor's article indicates the city will consider the Committee's recommendations as it continues to address homelessness locally. In the meantime, the Law Center will continue its work to ensure the recommendations are implemented by the federal government and cities across the country.

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Back to School: What the Education Project and GAO Report Mean for Homeless Youth

Back to School with the Education Project

Back to school season is in full swing. Many school districts across the country have opened their doors and ushered their students into the 2014-2015 school year. At the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (Law Center), the new school year presents new opportunities to maintain,

protect and expand the right of children and youth experiencing homelessness to achieve academic success.

The Law Center protects the rights of children and youth to attend school by providing guidance to advocates on the intricacies of the McKinney-Vento Act, facilitating informative training and resources that assist advocates and individuals advocating for the education rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and engaging in strategic reform efforts at the federal and state levels to ensure the protection and expansion of these education rights. The Law Center has created helpful resources to assist advocates, school administrators, and individuals enforce their education rights of the McKinney-Vento Act, including:

- [Education of Homeless Children & Youth: A Guide to their Rights](#)
- [McKinney-Vento School Legal Checklist](#)
- [McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Procedures](#)
- [Homeless Education Advocacy Manual-Disaster Edition](#)

View more of our resources at http://nlchp.org/youth_resources. For more information on how to increase access to public school for homeless children and youth please contact our attorney, Lisa Coleman Curtis, at lcurtis@nlchp.org or (202) 638-2535.



Photo by Bindaas Madhavi

Release of GAO Report on the Education of Homeless Students

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released its report on the Education for

Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program. Over the course of their investigation, the GAO conducted interviews with the U.S. Department of Education (ED), the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, and school district personnel from 20 school districts. The GAO examined:

- How districts identify and serve homeless students, and the related challenges;
- How ED and states collaborate with other service providers to address student needs; and
- How ED monitors compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act (Act).

Of particular interest to the Law Center, the report found:

- **Homeless liaisons average 2 hours per week of work on EHCY program responsibilities.**
 - The Law Center believes this is inadequate, especially considering the affirmative identification obligation on liaisons under the Act;
- **Nine out of the 20 school districts surveyed said that the lack of affordable housing makes it challenging to address the needs of homeless children.**
 - The Law Center addresses and provides effective best practice solutions to this issue in our [Beds and Buses Report](#). Our report's policy recommendation is echoed in the GAO report's recommendation to make the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) definition of homelessness consistent with definition of the U.S. Department of Education. The pending Homeless Children and Youth Act of 2014, if passed, would align HUD's definition. The Law Center joins other advocates in encouraging Congress to pass this much needed legislation. More information is [here](#).
- **One school principal surveyed stated that he was only able to offer 30% of the support services he would like to for homeless students.**
 - This emphasizes the need for current funding levels of the EHCY to be significantly increased, which will require the robust support of Congress so that students experiencing homelessness are no longer penalized.

Ultimately, the report recommends that ED develop an oversight plan that will ensure adequate monitoring of the EHCY program. The Law Center agrees with the report's recommendation that ED should implement improved oversight of the EHCY program at the state level, and that states improve their monitoring of districts. More information about the GAO report on the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program is [here](#).

Photo by [Bindaas Madhavi \(CC BY-NC-ND 2.0\)](#)

A New Resource for the Civil Right to Counsel Movement

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty has just participated in the launch of the most comprehensive resource in the civil right to counsel movement ever attempted: the National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel's new website at www.civilrighttocounsel.org. The project, led by [John Pollock](#) and the [Public Justice Center](#) in Maryland, is a cooperative effort that unites the NLCHP and 260+ other coalition participants in 36 different states.

[Click here](#) to find out more!

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