



Key Accomplishments: 2014

Cutting-edge litigation by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (“Law Center”) protected the rights of homeless people:

- *ACLU v. Boise*. The Law Center’s litigation (filed together with the local ACLU) invalidated an anti-solicitation law which prevented homeless and poor people from asking others for spare change. Troy Minton, one of the plaintiffs, lived in his truck after losing his home and solicited his fellow city residents to raise funds for gas so he could travel to work.
- *Frank v. Walker*. The Law Center challenged Wisconsin’s voter ID requirement that would have prevented some 200,000 low income people, many of them homeless, from voting. The resounding federal district court victory was reversed by the 7th Circuit; that reversal was stayed by the United States Supreme Court, where a petition for a writ of certiorari is now pending. Plaintiffs include Carl Ellis, a 52 year old homeless veteran who lacks the required documentation under the law.
- *Big Hart Ministries v. Dallas*. The Law Center won a favorable settlement in this successful case challenging a Dallas prohibition on food sharing, which prevented religious groups from offering food to homeless and poor people, affecting the city’s estimated 7,000 to 10,000 homeless residents.
- *Bell v. Boise*. The Law Center continued its federal court challenge to Boise’s anti-camping ordinance. One of its plaintiffs is Lawrence Lee Smith, a Boise resident who became homeless after his degenerative joint disease prevented him from continuing his employment in construction and sprinkler installation. He receives disability payments, but they are not enough to pay for housing. He slept outside in the woods. After being arrested under the ordinance and jailed for 90 days, he lost his tent, his stove, and his fishing equipment, which helped sustain him in the absence of shelter.

The Law Center’s strategic advocacy won new support and rights:

- The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness supported the Law Center’s position that criminalization violates the human rights of homeless people and disseminated this message broadly to cities across the country including publishing a joint blog with us on the issue.
- The Law Center won an initial agreement from one federal agency to use its funding authority to discourage criminalization by cities.
- The Law Center supported advocacy to enact a Homeless Bill of Rights in Duluth, Minnesota, and to implement a previously enacted Homeless Bill of Rights in Rhode Island to protect homeless people from discrimination in housing, employment, and public places (adding to its prior work supporting enactment of bills in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Illinois).
- The Law Center persuaded key United Nations Human Rights Committees to adopt its recommendations condemning state and local laws that criminalize homelessness in the United States and to support constructive alternatives, such as housing and services.

The Law Center conducted record outreach to engage and support local service providers and advocates:

- We helped families experiencing homelessness access their children’s educational rights through teaching advocates and others about Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Act.
- We hosted six webinar trainings reaching 1,259 attendees
- The Law Center co-authored the 4th edition of the American Bar Association’s *Educating Children Without Housing*, a primer on implementing the federal educational mandates related to homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- We published eight reports and two resource manuals that were downloaded 81,930 times:
 - *Welcome Home: The Rise of Tent Cities in the United States*
 - *No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in the United States*
 - *No Safe Place: Advocacy Manual*
 - *From Wrongs to Rights: The Case for Homeless Bill of Rights Legislation*
 - *Racial Discrimination in Housing and Homelessness in the United States*
 - *Housing and Homelessness in the United States of America: Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of the United States of America*
 - *Criminalization of Homelessness in the United States of America: A Report to the UN Committee Against Torture*
 - *Human Right to Housing Report Card*
 - *Human Rights to Human Reality: A Ten-Step Guide to Strategic Human Rights Advocacy*
 - *McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Procedures*
- The Law Center’s groundbreaking report *No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in the United States* was downloaded 20,564 times since its publication in July 2014, until December 2014
- We achieved record media attention with 129 mentions, including a *New York Times* editorial and an op-ed in *USA Today*, raising awareness on topics including criminalization, the human right to housing, and youth and education rights

The New York Times

Shunting the Homeless From Sight – July 17, 2014

“The number of places like Los Angeles that banned car sleeping, for example, has increased from 37 in 2011 to 81 this year, according to the study by the **National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty**. What local governments are facing — or rather not facing — is the continuing effects of a recession that has driven desperate people from their homes and jobs in ways that have become all too public in the eyes of politicians and their constituents. ‘They have an interest in not having poor people be very visible,’ is the apt and sad summary offered by Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the law center. The 45-page study’s depressing conclusion is that the criminalization of homelessness is increasing across the country.”



Report: More cities pass laws that hurt the homeless – July 16, 2014

“The laws are meant to curb the problems associated with homelessness, such as public drunkenness and sleeping on the sidewalk. But the report, released Wednesday by the **National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty**, says the laws criminalize people just for being homeless... ‘They have an interest in not having poor people be very visible,’ she says. Foscarinis says there is a housing crisis nationwide. ‘We see fewer affordable housing units, particularly for the very poor,’ she says. Federally subsidized housing often has years-long wait lists, she says.”



Criminalisation of Homelessness in U.S. Criticised by United Nations – September 2, 2014

“‘These are human rights experts who have seen human rights abuses all over the globe, but still when they hear about these issues in the United States it boggles their mind,’ Eric S. Tars, a senior attorney with the **National Law Center on Poverty & Homelessness**, told IPS