

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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Homeless People Sue for Unconstitutional Destruction of their Property

(September 19, 2018, Washington, DC) – Six homeless people whose property was destroyed when they were evicted from their outdoor homes filed a lawsuit against the City of Puyallup and Pierce County, Washington. The complaint alleges that the city and county violated their constitutional rights when they destroyed or threw away their shelters and other needed property on little or no notice, and without any opportunity to challenge the destruction.

“Homelessness is a crisis across the country, but simply removing people from public view is not the solution,” said Maria Foscarinis, executive director at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. “Puyallup’s approach is not only cruel, it is shortsighted, counterproductive and a waste of taxpayer dollars.”

One plaintiff, a U.S. military veteran, lost the tools he uses for work, and paperwork that he needs to receive services through Veterans Affairs. His wife, a certified nursing assistant who had to stop working when her health declined, lost her birth certificate and other identification papers, medications, and irreplaceable pictures of her family. This was not all they lost.

“There are hundreds of unhoused people in the Puyallup community, and the city offers no year-round emergency shelter,” said Tristia Bauman, senior attorney at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. “Our plaintiffs cannot afford housing and have no option but to live outside. Yet the city repeatedly orders them to leave their tents or other outdoor homes without offering them a place to go or any way to secure their belongings, or simply bulldozes the property when the owners are not there.”

The complaint, filed by Perkins Coie LLC and the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, states that, “safeguarding [homeless persons’] possessions—including those critical to their survival—is a central part of their existence and ability to maintain health and personal safety.”

Puyallup was named to the Hall of Shame in a 2016 report by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty for its growing criminalization of homelessness.

Ted Brackman, a member of the Puyallup Homeless Coalition, said that the Puyallup City Council has “ignored” the recommendations of local service providers – all of which are faith-based organizations that Mr. Brackman helped found.

“We have repeatedly asked our city council to increase access to affordable housing, and to open a year-round emergency shelter,” said Brackman. “But, rather than work with us to identify even a single lawful place where people can be, the city has only made it harder for the churches to provide even basic services.”

The city recently enacted a law to restrict privately offered homeless services in the area. That law, incidentally, is also the subject of pending legal action in Washington state court.

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[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 prevent and end 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.