

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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New Report Reveals Rapid Growth of Homeless Tent Cities Across U.S.

(December 20, 2017, Washington, D.C.) The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty released a new report, *Tent City USA: The Growth of America's Homeless Encampments and How Communities are Responding*, reviewing the rapid growth of homeless people living in tents across the United States over the past decade, as measured by documentation in media reports.

Research showed a 1,342 percent increase in homeless encampments reported between 2007 and 2017, with at least one encampment reported in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Encampments ranged in size, with half showing a size of 11-50 residents, while 17 percent had more than 100 residents. The report tracked the number of unique encampments as reported by the media, acknowledging that there are likely more encampments intentionally hidden or forced to move, and therefore not documented.

As encampments become increasingly common, local governments have enacted laws to prohibit living in tents. Three-quarters of all encampments recorded in the report are prohibited by law; only 4 percent were reported to be legal. Cities such as Denver, CO, Olympia, WA, and San Diego, CA were cited in the report for particularly harsh laws and sweeps that criminalize people experiencing homelessness. The report notes that evicting—or “sweeping”—people from tent communities is costly and ineffective.

“It’s cruel and counterproductive to take away the only shelter homeless people have,” said Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. “The proven solution to homelessness is housing, and ensuring it is available and affordable to people who have fallen on hard times is what will end homelessness, not criminalizing them for trying to survive.”

City officials often refer to shelters as an alternative to encampments, but in most communities they are full. And even when they have space available, people experiencing homelessness say shelters present their own host of problems.

“Agreeing to go to a shelter in that moment means losing many of your possessions. You have to pack what you can into a bag and leave the rest behind, to be stolen or thrown away,” said

Eugene Stroman, a homeless person living in an encampment in Houston, Texas. “You give up all this property for the guarantee...of a spot on the floor for one night.”

Eric Tars, senior attorney at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and lead researcher of the report, said, “People shouldn’t have to live in tents, but our report shares principles and practices for how communities can show compassion and meet basic needs in the short term.”

The report can be viewed [here](#).

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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.

The Law Center thanks the following law firms for their pro bono research support for Tent City USA: Ballard Spahr LLP, Blank Rome LLP, Hunton & Williams LLP, Nixon Peabody LLP, O’Melveny & Myers LLP, and Sullivan & Cromwell LLP. The Law Center also acknowledges the generous support of the Buck Foundation, Butler Family Fund, Deer Creek Foundation, and the Oakwood Foundation.