

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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Mayor Urged to Sign Indianapolis Homeless Bill of Rights

Indianapolis Passes Groundbreaking Homeless Bill of Rights

WASHINGTON, DC - On Monday, March 2nd, Indianapolis, Indiana became the first city in the nation to pass a full scale homeless bill of rights to protect homeless people from common forms of discrimination. The law, modeled on similar legislation enacted at the state level in Rhode Island, Illinois, and Connecticut, helps those experiencing homelessness realize basic rights that most people take for granted, such as the right to move freely in public spaces and the right to equal treatment by government agencies.

The law, introduced to the Indianapolis City-County Council by Democratic Councilman LeRoy Robinson, also breaks new ground by mandating that the government provide safe storage of homeless persons' belongings when they are displaced from encampments, and limits the ability of the government to force people from an encampment when there is insufficient alternative transitional or permanent housing.

"Indianapolis has shown admirable leadership in passing this landmark bill," stated Tristia Bauman, Senior Attorney at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (Law Center). **"By offering protection from pervasive forms of discrimination, the Indianapolis homeless bill of rights provides homeless people with practical tools to help them move from homelessness to self-sufficiency."** The Law Center worked with local advocates, including A Bigger Vision film production company whose documentary about the plight of homeless people in Indianapolis, *Uncharted: The Truth Behind Homelessness*, inspired the bill's introduction.

Despite this pioneering effort by the City-County Council, some fear that Mayor Greg Ballard may veto the bill. Homeless advocates, however, urge the Mayor to let the legislation stand, citing its many long-term benefits. **"Constructive policy approaches to homelessness save communities money,"** stated Maria Foscarinis, Executive Director of the Law Center. "Directing resources away from discriminatory practices will not only benefit Indianapolis' homeless community, but the entire city as well."

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The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (www.nlchp.org) 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.