

# NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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## More U.S. Cities Making It “Illegal to Be Homeless.”

### *Report Finds Criminalization of Homelessness on the Rise, Despite Mounting Evidence of Ineffectiveness*

**Washington, DC** - A new report from the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (“Law Center”), [\*No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities\*](#), details a startling rise in laws criminalizing homelessness across America - more and more U.S. cities are criminally punishing homeless people for engaging in necessary, life-sustaining activity in public places, even when they have no other options. “There is a severe shortage of affordable housing and a lack of emergency shelter options in our communities, leaving homeless people with no choice but to perform basic acts of survival in public spaces,” stated Maria Foscarinis, Executive Director of the Law Center. “Despite a lack of any available alternatives, more cities are choosing to turn the necessary conduct of homeless people into criminal activity. Such laws threaten the human and constitutional rights of homeless people, impose unnecessary costs on cities, and do nothing to solve the problems they purport to address.”

The number of laws restricting or prohibiting the basic human activities of homeless people has significantly increased since 2011, according to the Law Center’s survey of 187 cities across the country. Over half of the surveyed cities have laws restricting or prohibiting sitting or lying down in public, representing a 43% increase since 2011. Other criminalization laws have become even more prevalent. Laws prohibiting living in vehicles have increased by a dramatic 119% since 2011.

The Law Center’s research also shows a 60% increase in city-wide bans on basic activities, suggesting that the nature of criminalization is changing. Rather than limiting criminalization laws to certain parts of the city, like downtown commercial districts or tourist areas, more cities are banning these activities throughout the entire community, effectively making it illegal to be homeless anywhere in the city.

“Criminalization laws are the least effective and most expensive way for cities to address homelessness in their communities,” stated Tristia Bauman, Senior Attorney at the Law Center, and primary author of the report. “Instead of wasting limited public resources on strategies that do nothing to address the underlying causes of homelessness, and are often illegal, cities would be much better served by pursuing sensible, cost-effective, and humane constructive alternatives to criminalization.” The report recommends several of these positive solutions to homelessness, including increased investment in affordable housing and improved police training and practices.

The Law Center will host a press call today at 2pm EST, to discuss the [report](#) and answer questions. To receive dial-in information for the call, contact LaTissia Mitchell at (202) 638-2535, or [lmitchell@nlchp.org](mailto:lmitchell@nlchp.org).