

# NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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## **DOJ to Law Enforcement: Don't Criminalize Homelessness** *Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Provides Guidance*

**Washington, D.C.** - On December 9, 2015, the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, published a [newsletter](#) encouraging law enforcement to promote alternatives to the criminalization of homelessness. The newsletter, which reaches more than 6,500 subscribers across the country, included articles produced in coordination with the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health & Human Services, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#).

"This newsletter is a great next step building on the Department of Justice's [statement of interest brief](#) opposing criminalization of homelessness earlier this summer," said Maria Foscarinis, Executive Director of the Law Center, which has produced [numerous reports on criminalization of homelessness](#). "The federal government, through agencies like the DOJ, HUD, HHS, and the USICH, is giving local actors the tools and motivation they need to stop violating the civil and human rights of those forced to be on the streets and instead take constructive steps to end homelessness for the benefit of everyone."

"Communities across the country are dedicated to ending and preventing homelessness, and law enforcement can play key roles and offer unique perspectives necessary to inform this discussion and end the cycle between homelessness and jail or prison experienced by so many," states Matthew Doherty, Executive Director of the USICH. "This newsletter provides us with an important opportunity to advance the dialogue."

In her article, Marcy Thompson, Senior Advisor at HUD points out the shared interests of law enforcement and housing agencies: "Homeless service agencies and law enforcement agencies have the same goal in mind: to reduce the incidence of homelessness, particularly for people who are staying out on the streets. Law enforcement agencies can be a critical

partner in local efforts to end homelessness. Communities that have developed these partnerships have seen reductions in the number of persons experiencing homelessness and the number of arrests for life-sustaining activities such as panhandling.”

“Most law enforcement officers don’t go into the field excited to arrest homeless people for simply trying to survive, but many end up being forced into such a role,” explained Eric Tars, Senior Attorney at the Law Center and author of one of the articles. “We are excited that the DOJ COPS Office is providing officers looking to play a positive role in ending homelessness with a way forward.”

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*The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty ([www.nlchp.org](http://www.nlchp.org)) 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.*