

IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



*Changing Laws,
Changing Lives*

*News and Commentary for
March 2014*

IN THIS ISSUE

- 1) [U.N. Focuses on Criminalization](#)
- 2) [Tent Cities; Our New Report](#)
- 3) [Domestic Violence and Homelessness](#)
- 4) [Endorsing Congresswoman Speier's Challenge](#)
- 5) [Welcome, Steve Judge!](#)
- 6) [Thank You to Our Supporters](#)

STAY CONNECTED



[DONATE TODAY!](#)

Dear Friends,

Last week, we took our advocacy to Geneva, Switzerland, where the UN Human Rights Committee was reviewing US compliance with the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. Drawing heavily from [our report](#), the Committee questioned our government on the criminalization of homelessness, and asked what it [plans to do to end it](#).

Our report and advocacy clearly made an impact on the Committee, and the Committee Chair drew special attention to the criminalization of homelessness in his [closing comments](#).

Without our work - and your support - this critical issue would not have gotten attention.

Our goal is for this international advocacy to have an impact here at home, and - with our follow up - it is. We're pleased that HUD has now indicated a willingness to use its influence to reverse this [inhumane, costly and senseless trend](#), and that the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness is working with us to encourage its members to forgo criminalization in favor of [constructive alternatives that respect human rights](#).

We have a long way to go, as highlighted by our new report, [Welcome Home](#), which reviews the disturbing rise of tent cities across the country-and the equally disturbing efforts to forcibly



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

Check out our [latest report on tent cities in the United States](#)

dismantle them and criminally punish their occupants, in the absence of reasonable alternatives.

But now, thanks to our work and our supporters, we're making headway.

U.N. Human Rights Committee Focuses on Criminalization - Geneva

Last week, Law Center Policy Director Jeremy Rosen highlighted criminalization of homelessness at the United Nations Human Rights Committee's review of United States compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The review was held at the U.N. in Geneva, Switzerland.



Jeremy Rosen in Geneva

Rosen was at the U.N. pressing the Human Rights Committee to find that criminalization of homelessness in the U.S. violates Article VII of the Covenant, which prohibits cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. This language is very similar to the 8th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which bars cruel and unusual punishment and has been used by the Law Center and other advocates to successfully challenge local criminalization ordinances.

Thanks to the Law Center's advocacy, criminalization was made part of the Committee's "[list of issues](#)" to be discussed at the review, forcing the US government to respond [in its own report](#). The Law Center then issued [a shadow report](#), laying out the case for criminalization being a treaty violation. We were the only US NGO to focus on this issue.

At the review itself, Committee Member Walter Kaelin asked the US delegation a question about criminalization as cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment - [straight from our report](#). And Committee Chair Sir Nigel Rodney indicated that criminalization is

one of the top 3 issues for the Committee to address in its Concluding Observations - the Committee's findings and recommendations to the US - scheduled to be released no later than Friday, March 28. Video of the Human Rights Committee's review of the U.S. is available [here](#).

Based on the strength of the question and the interest in homelessness displayed by the chair's concluding comment, we are optimistic that the Concluding Observations will be strong, which in turn will benefit our advocacy with HUD and the Department of Justice to ensure that those agencies cease any funding of criminalization and take affirmative steps to provide communities that do not criminalize with additional resources, as well as advocacy by local groups fighting criminalization policies and practices.

Tent Cities on the Rise Across America

Homeless encampments have been documented in almost every state across the country, with many more going unreported, according to a new report from the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and the Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic at Yale Law School.



The report, [Welcome Home: The Rise of Tent Cities in the United States](#), documents media reports of homeless encampments in 46 of 50 states. It discusses positive and negative approaches taken in four case studies, in Providence, R.I, Lakewood, N.J, St. Petersburg, FL, and New Orleans, LA, and analyzes applicable state, federal, and international human rights law. [The Law Center's webinar](#), which included a speaker from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, analyzed the report and other recent Law Center activity.

"While individuals may 'choose' to live in an encampment, it is our collective choices as a society that force this choice due to failure to create adequate affordable housing solutions or even the basic safety net of adequate shelters," said Eric Tars, Director of Human Rights & Children's Rights Programs at the Law Center, "Tent cities represent our country's failure to guarantee the human right to housing, and should never be considered permanent solutions; but where they exist, residents must be treated with respect and only evicted by making adequate alternatives available."

The report builds on [previous Law Center reports](#) on the criminalization of homelessness which emphasize that criminalization of homelessness is not only legally and morally improper, but fiscally imprudent for communities. [Welcome Home](#) contains a number of policy recommendations that can be implemented by federal, state, and local authorities.

The report received coverage in a number of media outlets, including the [National Low Income](#)

[Housing Coalition](#) and [LoanSafe](#).

Domestic Violence - Leading Cause of Homelessness

In 2013, [16% of all homeless adults](#) were victims of domestic violence. The proportion is even higher for women, with as many as [one in every four homeless women](#) reporting domestic violence as the cause of their homelessness. Additionally, between 50% and 100% of homeless women have experienced domestic or sexual violence at some point in their lives.



1 in every 4 homeless women report domestic violence as the cause of their homelessness.

Safe, stable, and legally protected housing is critical to preventing homelessness for survivors.

A [recent census](#) by the National Network to End Domestic Violence found that victims of domestic violence experienced "devastating unmet needs" when requesting emergency shelter or transitional housing. In fact, shelter and housing requests accounted for 60% of all unmet needs in the census; in a single 24-hour period, 5,778 requests from domestic violence victims for shelter or housing went unmet due to limited resources. This lack of safe housing often leaves victims with an impossible choice - to return to their abusers and face additional violence, or to become homeless.



Such a choice is frightening even for a single adult, and heartbreaking for a parent trying to escape violence with her children. Access to emergency shelter and safe, affordable housing are vital for victims to escape violence and avoid homelessness.

One year ago this month, President Obama [signed](#) the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (VAWA) into law. Thanks to years of advocacy by the Law Center and our allies, the law includes a major extension of housing protections for victims of domestic and sexual violence living in public and

federally subsidized housing, including preventing eviction of victims based on the actions of their abusers, and requiring Public Housing Authorities to adopt emergency transfer policies.

March is Gender Equality Month but the Law Center is working throughout 2014 to secure strong implementation of this law, to help prevent domestic violence survivors from becoming homeless.

Endorsing Congresswoman Speier's Challenge

Last Month, Congresswoman Speier spent a night in the crowded Maple Street Shelter in Redwood

City, California. She describes being "hit hard in the heart" by the conversations she had with the homeless shelter guests. The experience had such a profound impact on her that she issued a challenge to her fellow colleagues: "spend the night, break bread, listen, learn, and move toward providing some hope to those who need it the most."



Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) at Maple Street Shelter - Photo By Mila Zelkha

Congresswoman Speier [circulated a letter](#) among her colleagues encouraging them to take the Homeless Shelter Challenge. The letter not only issues the challenge, but also describes the interactions Speier had during her stay in the shelter. "One couple I spoke with both work full-time," she wrote, "two people with two full-time jobs and they're homeless? It's not right."

Her experience mirrors [Sen. Chris Murphy's](#), who spent the day shadowing a homeless man in Connecticut and later acquiring a deeper understanding of homelessness. As both these Members of Congress show--spending time, especially a night in a homeless shelter, can be an effective way for Members of Congress to understand homelessness and poverty by hearing directly from

the people affected by it.

The Law Center is pleased to join other advocacy groups in endorsing Speier's Homeless Shelter Challenge.

The Law Center Welcomes a New Board Member: Steve Judge

The Law Center is proud to announce the election of Steve Judge to its Board of Directors. Steve brings a deep commitment to this role. He currently serves as President and CEO of the [Private Equity Growth Capital Council](#), a position he has held since 2012. Before joining the Council, Steve was Senior Vice President, Government Affairs and Head of the Washington Office for the Securities Industry Association (SIA), now the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association (SIFMA). Steve also served as a member of several congressional staffs.



Steve Judge Speaking at the Law Center's McKinney-Vento Awards Event-2013

Steve came to Washington, D.C. in 1978 with Congressman Bruce F. Vento (DFL-MN), eventually becoming the Congressman's Legislative Director. While working with Congressman Vento, Steve helped draft and spearhead what is now known as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the first major federal legislation to address homelessness. He has been a friend and supporter of the Law Center - whose founder, Maria Foscarinis, worked with Steve on the Act - since that time. Last year, Steve served as Chair of the Law Center's McKinney-Vento Awards event committee; his leadership was instrumental in making it our most successful event to date.

We are thrilled to welcome Steve Judge to the Law Center's Board of Directors.

To learn more about Steve Judge, [click here](#).

Thank You

We want to especially thank the following supporters for their recent, new support of our work:

- The Ford Foundation
- The Sunrise Initiative

We are also grateful for the continued support from our [LEAP member firms](#), and all of our other institutional and individual donors.

Changing Laws. Changing Lives.

The Law Center is the only national legal advocacy organization dedicated to ending and preventing homelessness in America. It fights in the halls of power for laws and policies that protect homeless people's rights and help them rise out of poverty.

www.nlchp.org