

IN JUST TIMES

a publication of the

NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY



Changing Laws,
Changing Lives

News and Commentary for
October 2014

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Dear Friends,

It's been just over 30 years since I first got involved in working on homelessness, when [I was a young litigator](#) at a big law firm in NYC, my hometown. I had volunteered to work on a pro bono case representing thousands of homeless families on Long Island who had been denied emergency shelter in a federal court class action.



Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director

Going out to visit our clients in these otherwise wealthy NYC suburbs, I saw families living in abandoned buildings, in rooms with parts of their floors missing and kids pushed up next to exposed wires. I saw families living in their cars. It was the early 1980s, and [the beginning of the explosion](#) in modern day homelessness in America which was affecting families and suburban communities.

We won our case, setting important precedent and shifting county and state policy. As a young pro bono lawyer, I experienced firsthand the [power of the law](#) - backed by the resources of a major law firm - to make positive social change. In 1989 I started the [Law Center](#) to devote myself full time to this effort - and to bring others to it.

Today at the Law Center we mobilize dozens of major law firms and lawyers each year to bring their talents, energy and resources to legal advocacy for homeless people and for solutions to

Scorecard. See how we did!

**No Safe Place
&
CERD Housing
Report**

homelessness. [Last year alone](#), we leveraged almost \$4 million in donated legal services through these pro bono partnerships, affecting millions of people as well as supporting our local level partners.

October 19-25 is designated [National Pro Bono Awareness Week](#), and we fully support that. But at the Law Center, we celebrate the contributions of our [pro bono partners](#) every day.

There are many ways to be involved and to support our work, and we also especially appreciate the overwhelming support for our very successful McKinney-Vento Awards/ 25th Anniversary celebration event from so many partners and supporters.

We could not do our work without you. Thank you.

McKinney-Vento Awards



Highlights From Our 16th Annual Awards Event!

Our 25th Anniversary celebration at this year's [McKinney-Vento Awards](#) was our most successful event ever, with a full house and incredible energy. ABC reporter Scott Thuman emceed the event, celebrating the accomplishments of the Law Center and engaging the audience. With the generous support of our donors, advocates, and [honorees](#), we raised over \$315,000 toward our work on behalf of homeless and vulnerable Americans. Thank you!

Featured in [Pro Player Insiders](#) and [Legal BisNow](#), our 2014 McKinney-Vento Awards provided an opportunity to reflect on our accomplishments and honor exceptional people - in the legislature, in private industry, and in the legal community - who are committed to addressing poverty and working towards justice.

When presenting the *Stewart B. McKinney Award*, Jeff Pash, General Counsel for the National Football League, said that honoree Steve Smith Sr., a record-breaking wide receiver now playing for the Baltimore Ravens, represents "everything that is good and admirable about the men who play in the [NFL]." Steve Smith Sr. described how he feels about the work he does with the [Steve Smith Family Foundation](#); "...it also says that work in a little town like Charlotte by a little organization [gets done] and a big city like D.C. notices." Senator Murray was grateful to receive the *Bruce F. Vento Award* and emphasized her dedication to leading the Senate to implement policies and provide funding for programs to help those facing homelessness. The *Pro Bono Counsel Award* was given to Sidley Austin LLP and accepted by Becky Troth, who discussed the partnership between Sidley Austin LLP and the Law Center, with a joint dedication to pro bono legal advocacy. Aleah Green received a standing ovation following her acceptance speech for the *Personal Achievement Award*. Please see below for more on her incredible story and speech.

We would like to again extend a sincere thank you to [Sidley Austin LLP](#) for being our Silver

Anniversary Sponsor, and to all of our [event sponsors](#).

Although there is so much more to do, we are grateful to all of our supporters for your dedication to ending homelessness. With your support, we change laws and we change lives.

Celebrating Pro Bono Week at the Law Center

"Partnering with the Law Center has not only been a great experience, but more importantly has been instrumental to our success in blocking the Wisconsin voter ID law and protecting the fundamental right to vote for hundreds of thousands of low income and homeless people."

- Neil Steiner, Dechert LLP

Pro bono partnerships are a cornerstone of the Law Center's work, and we are celebrating these partnerships this month during the American Bar Association's annual [National Pro Bono Celebration](#).

The support of our pro bono partners helps the Law Center to multiply the capacity of our small staff and modest budget, and achieve greater victories for homeless and poor Americans. Last year, 17 law firms worked with the Law Center on 42 pro bono matters, contributing more than 7,300 hours of donated legal services. Eleven of these firms were members of [LEAP](#), our signature pro bono network of firms that further the effort to end and prevent homelessness through their support of the Law Center with both donated legal services and direct financial support.

Our pro bono partners work with us on everything from protecting the rights of homeless children to a free public education by breaking down barriers to enrollment, to challenging laws that unfairly punish homeless people by criminalizing life-sustaining behaviors like eating or sleeping in public, to participating in high-impact litigation to protect the civil and human rights of homeless people.

The Law Center partnered with [Dechert LLP](#) on a recent piece of high-profile impact litigation challenging the Wisconsin voter ID law. Working with Dechert Partner Neil Steiner, and Associates Craig Falls, Angela Liu, and Diane Princ, we recently received a favorable decision from the U.S. Supreme Court, blocking the law from being implemented for the November election. Dechert has been a member of LEAP since 2009, and Suzanne Turner, chair of Dechert's firm-wide pro bono practice, serves as LEAP chair.

Pro bono partnerships are key to the Law Center's mission. We extend our sincere gratitude to all of our partners for your support and hard work throughout the year on behalf of homeless and poor Americans.

Supreme Court Blocks Wisconsin Voter ID Law

In a tremendous victory for the Law Center, on October 9 the U.S. Supreme Court issued an order blocking the State of Wisconsin from implementing its voter ID law for the upcoming November election. The order was issued in the Law Center's Frank v. Walker case, filed with co-counsel at the ACLU Voting Rights Project, the ACLU of Wisconsin, and Dechert LLP. We filed the case to prevent the disenfranchisement of the approximately 300,000 registered voters in Wisconsin, many of whom have been voting for decades, who do not have the ID needed to vote under the new ID law.

After filing the case in federal court in 2011 and successfully having the law put on hold while the case was decided, we won a major victory in April when the U.S. District Court found the voter ID law to be both unconstitutional and in violation of the Voting Rights Act, and enjoined it from going into effect. But the State of Wisconsin appealed the judge's ruling to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit and after oral arguments in early September, the appeals court abruptly allowed the law to go into effect for the November election, and shortly thereafter found it to comply with both the Constitution and Voting Rights Act.

We applied to the U.S. Supreme Court to intervene, and in a 6-3 decision, the Court blocked the appeals court order, letting stand the district court's order preventing the law from going into effect. The Supreme Court based its decision on the "chaos" that would likely result from changing the rules so close to the election.



Photo by Theresa Thompson

The Supreme Court order means most importantly that the law will not be in effect for November's election. Beyond November, the law will remain on hold should the Law Center and our co-counsel appeal to the Supreme Court seeking a reversal of the 7th Circuit's decision on the merits. Such an appeal, if filed, would be due by January 5, 2015.

Read the following key documents from Frank v. Walker:

[Supreme Court order](#)

[The Law Center's application to the Supreme Court](#)

[Judge Posner's strong dissent from the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals](#)

Photo by [Theresa Thompson \(CC BY 2.0\)](#)

A Standing Ovation for Aleah Green

Below is an excerpt of Ms. Green's incredible speech during our McKinney-Vento Awards. It was an honor to recognize her with the Personal Achievement Award.

"Now imagine: You have lost your home, vehicle, and any way to provide for your child.

You are standing with your son in a fairly crowded school lobby. Your son is old enough to start kindergarten and is anxious to start... and then you receive news that the school has denied your son the right to enroll in this school.

This was my experience. Everything that I had was gone, and now it seemed as though I could not even provide an education for my child.



Photo by Ben Zweig of [dceventphoto.com](#)

I made numerous attempts to persuade the school district, including sending a certified letter to the superintendent that provided a clear and concise definition of McKinney-Vento law, and finally going to the Michigan Department of Education who then try to persuade the district, but were also ignored...

The moment I made contact with the Law Center I came to realize that I had not lost everything. They reminded me that I was not powerless. And, fortunately for my son, I was able to establish a relationship with them, people who share the common goals of policy advocacy, as well as public education. Now, Shiloh is doing very well in school.

Homelessness is something that can happen to anyone, and at any time... I now truly understand that although my circumstances seemed out of my control, I am not powerless.

I have been inspired and empowered by the work of this wonderful organization. They advocated for my son's education and empowered me and enabled me to advocate on behalf of my son..."

To read the rest of Aleah's incredible story and speech please click [here](#).

Changing Laws. Changing Lives.

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 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.

www.nlchp.org