

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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Statement on Hurricane Harvey

Washington, D.C. (August 28, 2017)—*Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, issued the following statement in response to news about Hurricane Harvey:*

Over the weekend, as Hurricane Harvey pummeled south Texas with deadly winds and heavy rains, leaving thousands of people in the Houston area displaced, it brought the reality of homelessness to the fore for millions. At the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (Law Center), where we work daily to help homeless Americans across the country, we are grateful to emergency responders who worked tirelessly to rescue families and individuals, and we support local shelters and service centers opening their doors to provide critical support.

We are particularly concerned for people in the area who were already homeless due to the man-made disaster of the affordable housing shortage. The Law Center is currently involved in litigation in Houston to challenge laws that criminalize people experiencing homelessness for camping in public, sleeping in public, and panhandling. Homeless Houstonians who were living outside before Harvey hit are now in even graver danger. Hurricane Harvey will have a lasting effect on the people we are representing in the lawsuit—and may result in thousands more becoming homeless.

Major hurricanes have devastating and long-lasting effects, particularly for families who are low-income or who are experiencing homelessness. Immediately following natural disasters, families are dispersed to a variety of living situations. Children and youth housed in shelters, hotels, motels, or with family members and friends will likely be categorized as “homeless,” according to the U.S. Department of Education. As hospitality wears thin, and FEMA’s temporary housing assistance ends, many families will remain unable to secure permanent housing—and remain homeless.

For those recovering from Harvey, the Texas Education Agency must coordinate efforts with other stakeholders and advocates to ensure displaced students are promptly identified, are able to access appropriate educational and other services, and are provided with educational continuity and stability. The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty’s [Homeless Education Advocacy Manual: Disaster Edition](#), issued first in response to 2005’s Hurricane Katrina and updated in 2013 after Hurricane Sandy, provides further information and resources on how displaced children and youth can remain in school.

After Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, federal, state, and local authorities did some things well, but failed to ensure the basic human rights of many of those displaced in the disasters. We strongly recommend applying the [UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#), which the U.S. Agency

for International Development applies to disasters abroad, to our own response to Harvey and future disasters.

In support of the relief and rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Harvey, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty will work with our local advocates and partners in Texas to ensure that people aren't arrested simply because they lack a home, displaced children and youth receive access to education, and homeless Houstonians receive the emergency support—and permanent housing—they need.

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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 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.