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2018 Key Accomplishments

In 2018, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (the Law Center) advanced an ambitious agenda to prevent and end homelessness. Working with legal and grassroots partners, and leveraging thousands of hours of pro bono legal time, the Law Center defended the civil and human rights of people experiencing homelessness, strengthened legal protections for vulnerable families and individuals, kept hundreds of thousands of homeless children in school, and advocated for the human right to housing.

Protecting Civil and Human Rights in the Courts

- **Freedom from Cruel & Unusual Punishment:** In September, the Ninth Circuit made a landmark ruling in *Martin v. Boise* holding that it is cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment to punish homeless persons for sleeping in public when they have no private alternative. Following the ruling, with our advocacy, dozens of cities stopped enforcing their ordinances and began considering more constructive, housing based solutions, improving the lives of tens of thousands of people experiencing homelessness.
- **The Right to Free Speech:** In August, *NLCHP v. Greensboro* brought a First Amendment challenge to a North Carolina city's ordinance punishing homeless and other poor people from asking for donations. The city repealed the ordinance the following week.
- **Disability Rights:** In August, a federal judge in *Bloom v. San Diego* issued a preliminary injunction ordering police to stop ticketing homeless people with disabilities living in the recreational vehicles, often the only affordable and appropriate shelter available in the city.

Organizing and Advocating to End Homelessness

- **Housing Not Handcuffs (HNH) Campaign:** The Law Center grew its HNH Campaign to almost 800 endorsements, including support from city officials and law enforcement.
- **National Forum on the Human Right to Housing:** The Law Center's annual Forum brought together more than 170 advocates, government officials, and currently and formerly homeless individuals; we awarded more than 20 travel scholarships to ensure currently and formerly homeless individuals' participation.
- **#IAskForHelpBecause Campaign:** In August, as part of the HNH Campaign, and building on a 2015 court victory, the Law Center launched a nationwide effort to strike down bans on panhandling, partnering with 15 groups in 12 states and targeting more than 240 communities. In the first months of the campaign, 27 cities repealed and 37 cities committed to review, amend or repeal their ordinances.
- **Jobs not Punishment:** In December, after the Law Center supported local advocacy opposing a proposed panhandling ordinance, two New York jurisdictions reversed course and announced a pilot program to offer jobs to people who are panhandling.

Educating the Public, Preventing and Ending Homelessness

- **Holding States Accountable for Protecting the Rights of Homeless Youth:** The Law Center, in partnership with True Colors United, launched a new campaign to end youth homelessness, including publishing a State Index on Youth Homelessness—a first-of-its-kind resource that evaluates all 50 states and the District of Columbia on 61 metrics on their efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness.
- **Leveraging Federal Dollars to End Criminalization of Homelessness:** After years of advocacy by the Law Center, in 2015 the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development’s \$2.2 billion grant stream for Continuums of Care offered additional points to communities that could document efforts to combat the criminalization of homelessness. In 2018, the Law Center published a toolkit tracking applicants’ responses over the first three years, promoting the best practices documented by the Continuums of Care.
- **Connecting Homeless Youth to Their Rights:** In October, the Law Center partnered with Baker McKenzie and the Walt Disney Company to launch *The Homeless Youth Handbook – Options for Safety and Stability*, a new online guide addressing the legal rights and providing resources for children and youth experiencing homelessness in Washington, D.C.
- **Protecting Tenants, Preventing Homelessness:** In March, the Law Center released *Protect Tenants, Prevent Homelessness* which details the relationship between renters’ rights, evictions, and homelessness. The report highlights issues low-income renters face and provides recommendations for improving housing security among vulnerable populations.
- **Documenting Lived Experience with Criminalization:** In February, the Law Center, in conjunction with the HNH Campaign and with the help of pro bono volunteers from Goldman Sachs, Fried Frank Harris Shriver & Jacobson LLP, and Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP, surveyed more than 90 homeless New Yorkers on their experiences with criminalization, and in November released its findings in, *Serving and Protecting? Survey Results on Homeless New Yorkers’ Experience with Law Enforcement*.

Media Coverage

In 2018, more than 200 articles mentioned the Law Center’s critical work. Highlights include:

- *Reuters* (Jan. 5) [Amid icy temperatures, some of Washington's homeless prefer to sleep rough](#)
- *Newsweek* (Jan. 16) [Why It’s Illegal to Feed the Homeless in Cities Across America](#)
- *New York Times* (Feb. 27) [A Homeless Camp in Our Back Yard? Please, a University Says](#)
- *NPR* (Mar. 6) [A Homeless Man's Truck Is His Home, Judge Rules In Seattle](#)
- *Los Angeles Times* (May 3) [On the grounds of People's Park, UC Berkeley proposes housing for students and the homeless](#)
- *Washington Post* (May 10) [As Amazon pursues a second headquarters, it battles hometown Seattle over tax to stem homelessness](#)
- *Huffington Post* (May 31) [Homelessness Can’t Be Solved With Fines And Arrests](#)
- *AP* (Sep. 4) [Court: Cities can’t prosecute people for sleeping on streets](#)
- *New York Times* (Sep. 5) [Laws Punishing Homeless People for Sleeping in Public Are Cruel and Unusual, Court Rules](#)