

What Do We Do When Civil and Human Rights are Under Attack? Stand Up and Fight Back

National Alliance to End Homelessness Innovations & Solutions Conference 2025



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Slides

A copy of this presentation available on the Whova App

Appendix

An appendix with a history brief of root causes of homelessness and cited examples with resources available on the Whova App

Meet n Greet

For those interested in connecting more, expanding on the conversation and getting involved with this work, we invite you to meet us after this session or reach out to us:

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Learning Objectives



Objectives in this session will help you feel empowered to create a strong foundational culture of resistance within communities by prioritizing the wants and needs of people most affected by the criminalization of poverty and homelessness, and help build confidence in integrating creative legal solutions as a tool to respond to growing threats.

01

Better understand the current and evolving threats to the civil rights of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness

02

Learn about critical legal aid partnerships to defend people's rights on the streets and in the courtroom

03

Learn about innovative policy and organizing tactics to fight back at the local and state levels

Current & Evolving Threats To The Rights of People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness (objective 1)



#1: Criminalization and discrimination

#2: Propaganda and Political Corruption

Current Threats: Criminalization & Discrimination (#1)



What is criminalization? – punitive attacks on the human and civil rights of people experiencing poverty and homelessness; carceral punishments for the involuntary act of living unsheltered.

Judicial system corruption & weaponization

- 2024 *Johnson* SCOTUS decision
 - Ruling: not unconstitutional/violation of 8th amendment to fine people for sleeping and/or camping public places
 - Unpaid fines lead to arrests
- Local municipalities appealing favorable court rulings nationwide i.e. *Kitcheon*
- Other harmful offensive litigation tactics that exacerbate conditions (overcrowding in shelters and on streets, too many people, not enough housing resources, etc.)
 - Mass evictions
 - Slumlords disputing oversight agencies when held accountable for violations such as discrimination and uninhabitability
 - Governments attacking community service organizations

Legislative attacks

- Introducing, sustaining and/or reinstating of measures like SODA, SOAP, no-sit-no-lie laws and camping bans
- Exclusionary zones defined and enforced through zoning codes
 - Sweeps escalation:
 - Orgs targeted as if they are “aiding and abetting” unhoused people; not administrative attacks rather attempts at murder so that the municipality doesn’t have to correct the issues and/or pushing to a different jurisdiction so that the other municipalities have to address issues (crack down on harm reduction)
 - Action = if your community is dealing with this, fight back and host sit-ins and/or file TRO’s

Sweeps

- Unhoused individuals and communities targeted
 - Cornelius Taylor (Atlanta), murdered by City during sweep his tent was bulldozed– Jan 2025 MLK Day prep
 - New Orleans and the 2025 Super Bowl – State shut down sanctioned camp and moved residents to a makeshift facility 20 miles away from downtown. Residents were loaded up into buses and militarized police forces were present
 - History of cities with similar policies for sporting events, concerts, marathons, etc.

Current Threats: Propaganda & Political Corruption (#2)

Myths

Myths reinforce harmful social and cultural narratives and stereotypes + foster miseducation designed to propagandize and incite divisiveness.

Tools used to reinforce the myths

Tools Continued

-
- Personal responsibility
 - SUD people “deserve” it
 - Fentanyl and opioid crises
 - “bootstraps” mentality/“trickle down economy”
 - “Service refusal”
 - Poor people are inherently immoral
 - Racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, elitism etc.
 - Adequate services and housing already exists
 - Number of unhoused population
 - Law & order approach is the only solution
 - Unhoused community is inherently “unsafe” therefore must be punished + carceral treatment
 - Racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, elitism etc.
 - Billionaire and millionaire coalitions (business owners and property owners)
 - Investment in media
 - Reinforce harmful rhetoric and censorship
 - Investment in politics
 - Donating to oppressive political campaigns + 501c4’s
 - Politicians
 - Campaigning using harmful rhetoric that reinforces criminalization measures to garner votes
 - Corporate collusion
 - Politicians accepting funds from billionaire and millionaire coalitions in exchange for lobbying, bill blocking and introduction of legislation that seeks to protect the ruling class and oppress poor people
 - 47 POTUS administrative agenda
 - Attack on civil and human rights
 - Revoking DEI policies, rolling back critical migrant and immigrants rights while escalating criminalization
 - Exploitation: bad actors aka “Wolves in sheep clothing”
 - (Nonprofit industrial complex) NGO’s that assimilate and/or take action to reinforce criminalization measures due to funding weaponization and exploitation
 - Includes service providers, “community based” government advisory boards/committees, 501c4’s and CBO’s
 - Focused more on relationships with oppressors than with community in order to protect and adhere to their funding contracts
 - NGO’s that participate in sweeps posing as “clean ups” while neglecting to ensure that the communities are housed/offered service referrals

Critical Legal Aid Partnerships to Defend People's Rights on the Streets and in the Courtroom (objective 2)

Movement Lawyering!

Legal Defense Clinics

Law Schools

Local Legal Aid Organizations

Critical Legal Aid Partnerships



Movement Lawyering is a set of principles that challenges the traditional practice of law and centers innovative legal strategies designed with community in the lead and attorneys working alongside organizers.

Movement Lawyering

Law Schools

Local Legal Aid Organizations

-
- Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) historic partnership with the National Homeless Law Center (NHLC)
 - Legal Defense Clinic (LDC) grassroots model
 - Aims to create national network of movement-driven legal clinics dedicated to dismantling the carceral complex of laws and policies that target unhoused communities.
 - History - originated in the late 1990's
 - Current expansion work
 - *Grants Pass v Johnson*
 - Collaborative amicus briefs (WRAP + NHLC + Professor Sara Rankin, etc.)
 - KYR training before, during and after SCOTUS ruling
 - Court listening sessions
 - Johnson SCOTUS oral arguments April 2024 (HRHC + SNS + NLG + ACLU)
 - Seattle University School of Law, Homeless Rights Advocacy Project (HRAP)
 - Directed by movement attorney Professor Sara Rankin
 - HRAP legal clinics with HRHC
 - University of the Pacific
 - Buccola Family Homeless Advocacy Clinic
 - University of California Berkley
 - Homelessness Service Project
 - American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
 - ACLU of WA impact litigation
 - *Kitcheon* (Seattle) and *Currie* (Spokane)
 - Amicus briefs in collaboration with community + KYR & informational supports
 - National Lawyers Guild (NLG)
 - Know Your Rights (KYR) teach-ins
 - Legal observation services
 - NLG *FarWest Chapter*
 - On the ground sweeps response
 - It's important to build relationships/get to know the local orgs and attorneys first before engaging in strategy and power building
 - Not every chapter operates with movement lawyering principles
 - Consider: if there's no adequate legal aid org, create one!

Innovative Policy and Organizing Tactics to Fight Back at the Local and State Levels (objective 3)



Movement Lawyering

Intersectional Solidarity

Street Outreach

Campaigns

Direct Action



Policy and Organizing Tactics

Movement Lawyering

Street Outreach

Direct Action

-
- Education and empowerment
 - KYR
 - “Train the trainer’ & legal observers
 - I.e. Movement Law Lab and Law4blackLives and LA CAN legal clinic
 - Pro se representation
 - Free legal aid services
 - Legal clinics
 - Impact litigation
 - I.e. TRO’s against local municipalities for excessive criminalization
 - Legal observation
 - Administrative and court claims
 - HRHC property destruction and retrieval at sweeps legal defense model + SU HRAP partnership
 - Mutual Aid
 - Providing urgent survival needs and harm reduction while engaging in political education and organizing
 - I.e. Poor People’s Army, local MA orgs
 - Survey assessments to help drive community advocacy and organizing tactics
 - WRAP - street outreach survey
 - HRHC - People’s Needs Assessment
 - Relationship building leading to power mapping and campaign building
 - People actively impacted leading direction of programming
 - Organization to be a vessel
 - Leadership development to bring people in as experts
 - Sweeps response networks
 - I.e., Stop the Sweeps
 - Mitigate damages and trauma during/immediately following sweeps
 - Document violence and law violations for future potential impact litigation and political advocacy
 - Housing takeovers
 - Legal Observation and cop watching for potential arrests and jail support, future impact litigation (attorney representation or pro se litigants), political advocacy, and report publishing
 - Separate from sweeps – monitoring daily police surveillance/harassment
 - Includes unhoused individuals + communities + providers
 - Protest in place during sweep displacement
 - Must have proper planning and preparation
 - Power mapping
 - Risk assessments
 - Long-term goals and strategies
 - People power – committed organizers

Policy and Organizing Tactics Continued



Campaigns

Intersectional Solidarity & Cross-Sector Organizing

- Organize against local Business Improvement District (BIDs)
 - Coalition building to open access to resources and limit barriers i.e. WRAP
 - BID research reports
 - Fact sheets
 - Artwork
 - Note that art is important in all organizing tactics
- National collaborations
 - House Keys Not Handcuffs (NHLC + NCH)
 - Threat tracker - map that tracks criminalization
- Legislative advocacy to inform and drive local policies
- Imperative to fully address root causes of homelessness
- BIPOC grassroots organizations
 - Prison and sentencing reform, restorative justice, and re-entry advocacy/service groups
 - Voting rights groups
 - Immigrants rights groups
 - Rapid Response networks (i.e. WAISN)
- Public Health
 - Oversight and advisory spaces
 - Collaboration with Medical Universities
 - UW Med Huskies for Housing program – Tent City 3
- Medical-Legal partnerships
 - Vision for the future: KYR trainings & legal clinics at camps/in community (LDCs) with healthcare rights and homeless rights attorneys/experts
- Disability rights
 - Mental Health/trauma healing organizations i.e. MH First Oakland
 - Providing non-police responses to sweeps and other crises on the ground that focus on trauma-informed de-escalation practices
 - KYR - police interactions and the ADA, reasonable accommodations at encampments and shelters
- LGBTQIA+ rights groups
 - Name change legal clinics
- Tenants Rights Groups

Using legal defense strategies and organizing tactics to help enforce our human and civil rights while being punished for the involuntary act of living outside is a powerful way to counter oppression, but it is important to remember that the only solution to ending homelessness is housing first with an emphasis on permanent supportive housing models.

In the meantime, there are existing tools to use to fight back against criminalization – we do not have to reinvent the decriminalization wheel, we just need to abundantly fund organizations who actively deliver these strategies so that we may mitigate risks in an equitable way and save lives on a larger scale!

 **Conclusion + Q&A**

reach out to connect



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