Homelessness is up 16% since 2011

Every night, 58,423 people are homeless in Los Angeles County according to a report recently released by the LA Homeless Services Authority. The one bright spot in the findings is that the number of veterans who are homeless in LA County has decreased by 23% over the past two years. What can explain these seemingly contradictory trends? The answer very simply is resources.

Over the past two years, Congress appropriated more than $460 million in new federal assistance to the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program and issued 2,850 new housing rental subsidies to veterans nationwide. As a result, veteran homelessness has significantly decreased. In contrast, federal funding for non-veterans who are homeless has plummeted. In 2012, funding for the very successful Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program ended. In 2013 the federal sequester drastically cut rental subsidies for non-veterans. New permanent supportive housing developments, which rely on these subsidies to house people suffering long-term homelessness, have all but stopped. All this while Los Angeles’ rental rates have rebounded to pre-recession levels. Given these factors, it is no surprise that overall homelessness has increased.

Our take-away from the 2013 Homeless Count is that we know how to reduce homelessness, but it will only happen when we invest adequate resources. Numerous studies have shown that investing public money in ending homelessness actually saves money. When chronically homeless people are housed in permanent supportive housing, public costs are reduced. For an excellent report on the savings from ending homelessness, please see the Economic Roundtable’s 2009 Where We Sleep: The Costs of Housing and Homelessness in Los Angeles at http://www.economicrt.org/summaries/Where_We_Sleep.html.

Pro Bono Prevents HIV+ Clients from Becoming Homeless

Mr. Collins and Mr. Lowell (not their real names) are an HIV+ couple who live paycheck to paycheck on Mr. Lowell’s veterans benefits and Mr. Collins’ part-time job as a tow truck driver. Last summer, their landlord put them into crisis when he illegally increased their rent at the same time that Mr. Collins was laid off and Mr. Lowell was hospitalized and had to temporarily move to an assisted living facility. Mr. Collins and Mr. Lowell could not afford to pay the full amount of the increased rent on the day it was due. As a result, the landlord served a three day notice to pay rent or leave. Although they were able to get the money together within the notice period, the landlord illegally refused to accept the rent, and instead filed an unlawful detainer to have them evicted.

Pro bono attorney Emil Petrossian from Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP stepped up to help our clients. Emil filed and ultimately won a Motion for Summary Judgment primarily based on the landlord’s illegal refusal to accept the rent. After the case was dismissed, ICLC filed an illegal rent increase complaint. Initially, the landlord agreed to lower the rent to the Injinal amount and refund the excess rent paid. However, the landlord then served the tenants with a 60 day notice to terminate the tenancy. ICLC was able to defeat the notice because it violated local law. Next, the landlord started mailing the tenants rent payments back to them. Finally, six months after the case was opened, the landlord agreed to accept all past due rent after ICLC convinced him that he could not legally evict our clients.

As a result of ICLC’s and Manatt’s work, Mr. Collins and Mr. Lowell avoided homelessness and potential disaster. Mr. Collins recently went back to work and their housing is once again secure and stable.

Inner City Law Center Board Member Nominated as Ambassador to Belize

Just last week, President Obama nominated Inner City Law Center Board Member, and former California Supreme Court Justice, Carlos Moreno to be the United States Ambassador to Belize. This is not the first time the President has considered Justice Moreno for an appointment. He was reported to be on Obama’s shortlist for the U.S. Supreme Court in 2009, prior to the appointment of Sonia Sotomayor. Congratulations to Justice Moreno!

About Inner City Law Center

Inner City Law Center is the preeminent housing and homelessness legal-services organization working on behalf of poor people in Southern California. As the only provider of legal services located on Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles, ICLC combats slum housing throughout Los Angeles and develops strategies to end homelessness.

Each year, ICLC’s staff of 40 (including 20 attorneys) provides free, high-quality legal representation to thousands of low-income tenants, working-poor families, immigrants, people who are homeless or disabled, and veterans. Driven by the fundamental principle that every person should always be treated with dignity and respect, ICLC works for long-term, positive, and meaningful change.