Lawyers Working to End Poverty

Nearly 50 million Americans now live below the federal poverty line. Recent societal, economic and political events have given rise to unprecedented public awareness of historic levels of income inequality, numbers of children living in poverty and disparate treatment and impacts of the law and justice systems on communities of color and populations that face other barriers and obstacles to justice, such as disability, limited English proficiency, immigrant status and other factors. Through this initiative, the Commission is identifying, promoting and implementing best practices for eliminating legal and justice system-related policies, practices and procedures, including those tainted by structural racialization and other forms of bias, that perpetuate or worsen the harmful effects of poverty and discrimination on individuals, families and households. A toolkit with blueprints for action is available online at ambar.org/homeless under “Collaborate to Advocate.”

Homeless Youth Legal Network

With at least one million youth in America on the streets and in shelters, the Commission is equipping lawyers with the tools needed to address their special legal needs. Through the Homeless Youth Legal Network’s innovative multi-pronged legislative advocacy, direct legal services and pro bono initiative, unaccompanied homeless youth—including overrepresented subpopulations such as LGBTQ youth and youth of color as well as those transitioning from the child welfare and juvenile justice systems—will benefit from greater legal protection, increased social services, and access to justice. The Network improves outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness by removing legal barriers to benefits, education, employment, housing, identification, treatment and services. For more information, please visit ambar.org/homelessyouth.

Homeless & Low-Income Veterans Justice Initiative

Nearly 60,000 veterans experience homelessness on any given night, and roughly 1.4 million other veterans are considered at risk of homelessness. In support of the Federal Plan to End Homelessness among Veterans, the Commission is fostering the development of Veterans Treatment Courts and pro bono legal services programs aimed at removing barriers to benefits, employment, housing, treatment and services for veterans. Through this initiative, the Commission provides free technical assistance to judges, lawyers and providers across the country on how to launch a Veterans Treatment Court and other model programs, including a national effort launched in collaboration with the VA and HHS on child support issues for non-custodial homeless veterans. Technical assistance on how to provide administrative, civil and criminal legal services at Stand Down events for homeless veterans is also available.

Homeless Court Program

Typically set within homeless shelters, the Homeless Court Program provides a non-threatening environment for participants to resolve outstanding warrants and criminal charges that serve as barriers to benefits, housing, and employment. Instead of facing fines or incarceration, homeless individuals voluntarily participate in treatment and job training prior to appearing in court. The Commission has helped develop over 50 Homeless Court Programs nationwide, providing a desperately needed mechanism for homeless individuals to receive the legal services needed to reconnect with the community. The Commission provides free technical assistance to communities interested in launching a Homeless Court.

Curtin Justice Fund Legal Internship Program

An endowed fund maintained within the ABA Fund for Justice and Education, the Program provides $3,500 stipends annually to three law students in support of their summer internships at legal services organizations assisting homeless clients. Named in honor of former ABA President John J. Curtin, Jr., the Program aims to foster careers in public interest law.

Get Involved!

Support the Commission by engaging the legal community in your jurisdiction to promote model programs and best practices. Contact the Commission for free technical assistance.