WE ALL COUNT OR NOBODY COUNTS.

2021 ANNUAL REPORT
As Californians face rising costs of living and housing, eviction threats, and stagnant wages, more are falling into homelessness than ever before. Although the state experienced another significant budget windfall by way of its wealthy residents, California can’t seem to stop the bleed causing the housing and homelessness crisis. Western Center’s efforts to protect people from eviction, increase pay for low wage workers, expand access to health care, and get more cash into people’s pockets is all in service of one quest – economic dignity for all and its direct correlation, racial justice. People of color bear the brunt of California’s severe economic inequality, but everyone can feel the pressure and see the fallout. As we ask ourselves big questions about the future of our state, every Californian must look at the crisis we face and contend with ourselves, our society, and the misplaced values that allow billionaires to proliferate as thousands are forced onto the street.

With this year’s annual report, Sacramento photographer, advocate, and community member Gale Filter shares his portraits and stories captured while working among homeless communities in Sacramento – specifically, Show Up Sacramento, an organization providing showers, food, and clothing on-location multiple days per week (showupsac.ca); and Mercy Pedalers – cyclists providing outreach, resources, and basic necessities to people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento (mercypedalers.com).

The portraits and stories illustrate how systems like prison and foster care and lack of access to health care, housing, and other necessary services perpetuate homelessness and keep people locked out of opportunity. We hope that by viewing this annual report, you will not look away from our shared responsibility to make things better, and that you will join our fight to expand California’s prosperity to benefit everyone who lives here.
As my first full year as Western Center’s Executive Director progressed, it became clear that 2021 would hold just as many challenges as 2020 for our state, country, and world. Despite the challenges, I’m so proud that Western Center continued to wholeheartedly embrace its commitment to fighting systemic racial and economic injustice.

The COVID-19 public health crisis was also an economic crisis that exacerbated existing inequalities and was particularly devastating for marginalized communities. Ongoing state-sanctioned violence against Black people continues to expose just how deeply systemic racism and inequality permeate the institutions that shape California and the rest of our country.

Meanwhile, voting rights in the United States are also under relentless attack. The previous administration significantly undermined Americans’ faith in state and federal election systems while also failing to ensure equal access to the ballot. The Supreme Court substantially undercut voting rights enforcement, and the slate of voting restrictions passed in states across the country following the 2020 election made access to the ballot more elusive. Our allies across the country must stand in solidarity to oppose legislation that would create barriers to the right to vote, including photo voter identification bills, bills restricting tribal IDs for voting purposes, bills requiring voters or voter registration applicants to provide documentary proof of citizenship, bills limiting early voting opportunities, and bills that purge qualified voters.

Western Center continues to work diligently to preserve and strengthen economic security, health, housing, and basic needs for Californians impacted by poverty. In addition to the work highlighted in this annual report, Western Center is actively involved in monitoring the work of the historic California Reparations Task Force, a first-in-the-nation effort. Under state law, the task force is charged with investigating the history of injustice and brutality against Black people, “with a special consideration for African Americans who are descendants of persons enslaved in the United States.”

Since June 2021, the task force has gathered evidence, including issues related to housing, gentrification, and infrastructure in California. Among other things, experts testified about California’s history of redlining, building freeways through Black neighborhoods, unfairly seizing Black properties through eminent domain, school segregation, environmental justice, and the Great Migration. At the first meeting in June, the task force reviewed examples of other reparations programs. For example, Germany paid billions to Holocaust victims, and the United States provided restitution to Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II.

The American economy continues to benefit from the immeasurable contributions of people who were enslaved. The public and private sectors created inequality through a multidimensional and systematic array of discriminatory policies that effectively created a unique form of American apartheid. Now, generations later, Black descendants of enslaved people remain unable to reap the benefits of the American economy and continue to be shut out from opportunities to thrive.

Western Center deals with the fallout of America’s anti-Blackness and legacy of slavery every day when we work to protect people impacted by poverty. The legacy of American racism has resulted in worse social outcomes by most measures — from COVID-19 death rates, to incarceration rates, to homelessness, to employment and education.

We continue to call on our partners and stakeholders to join us in thinking deeply about how we can continue to build a better, stronger, more sustainable and fulfilling tomorrow for all Californians. Western Center will do its part by continuing to take diligent, measurable steps forward to advance human rights, economic dignity, and racial equity. We are counting on your continued partnership and support.

In solidarity,
CRYSTAL D. CRAWFORD, ESQ.
“I saw Ronnell on a R Street sidewalk early Sunday morning. It was cold and he had slept the night on the sidewalk. Ronnell has been homeless 10 years. He is a loner. I have never seen him with another person. Ronnell said that he was ok, but I could tell that the cold and wet weather were taking a toll.”

“I saw Ronnell on a R Street sidewalk early Sunday morning. It was cold and he had slept the night on the sidewalk. Ronnell has been homeless 10 years. He is a loner. I have never seen him with another person. Ronnell said that he was ok, but I could tell that the cold and wet weather were taking a toll.”

“Nearly 5 years ago I met Melanie in front of Poli’s barbershop on a cold Midtown morning. She was shivering. She wasn’t doing well. Melanie said that she had been homeless for 13 years. I gave her some money for coffee so she could get out of the cold. I am happy to report that Melanie has not given up. She continues to endure life on the streets, Covid-19, heat waves, and smoke alerts. Melanie is a survivor.”
“Teah and Tony live out of a tent, under a busy Sacramento freeway. I had not seen Teah and Tony in more than 18 months. Tony has asthma, Teah congestive heart failure. They have been living under the freeway for over a year. On Teah’s shirt is the word ‘Hope.’ Thousands of homeless Californians live next to or under freeways that have elevated levels of air pollution.”

HOW WE WORK

ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY
Western Center works with county, city, and state administrators to ensure policies and procedures are implemented properly across California to protect and uplift Californians living in poverty. Sometimes a simple shift in procedure, or guidance from our advocates, can make a difference in real life outcomes for thousands of Californians.

BUDGET ADVOCACY
While budget advocacy often proceeds quietly, its impact on individuals and families can be far reaching and life changing. Western Center’s advocacy pushes the state to use its budget to bring California closer to true economic and racial equity.

LAWSUITS
Western Center files litigation across California to ensure the laws to protect and support Californians with low incomes — laws we often sponsor in Sacramento — are upheld by government and private entities. Good laws mean nothing without enforcement.

POLICY ADVOCACY
Western Center’s state policy work centers on advancing legislation that gets to the heart of the issues causing California’s massive income inequality, unsustainable housing market, lack of access to health care, and destructive systems of justice.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
Western Center attorneys and advocates assist hundreds of legal services and community-based advocates throughout the state and nation. Community-based advocates and legal aid attorneys are often the only line of defense for people with low incomes when they are forced to navigate complex legal issues. In that way, Western Center’s support of and collaboration with local advocates and legal aid attorneys ripples across communities we all serve.

ABOUT WESTERN CENTER ON LAW & POVERTY

For over five decades, Western Center has advocated on behalf of Californians experiencing poverty in every branch of government—from the courts to the legislature. Through the lens of economic and racial justice, we litigate, educate and advocate around health care, housing, public benefits, access to justice, and financial security laws, policies, and administration.
Western Center settled three big cases in 2021. One was with the United States Department of Agriculture to get the emergency food benefits authorized by Congress for the pandemic to Californians most in need; another requires the state of California to provide access to health care for Medi-Cal applicants during the verification process (Medi-Cal is California’s version of Medicaid for no- and low-cost health care); and the last forced San Bernardino County to make changes to its General Relief program so more people experiencing extreme poverty can access financial assistance.

The lawsuits Western Center filed in 2021 include one to compel Los Angeles County to distribute emergency food benefits in a timely manner, and one against Harbor Regional Center in Torrance for discrimination against Latinx families seeking disability services.

Additionally, nine of Western Center’s co-sponsored bills were signed into law in 2021, including groundbreaking legislation like SB 62, making California an international leader in the fight to end exploitation of people working in the garment industry, and SB 65, which implements proven interventions to address California’s poor birth outcomes for Black and indigenous people.

Finally, Western Center was part of two successful negotiations to extend statewide protections to prevent evictions for hundreds of thousands of Californians unable to pay rent due to the pandemic. Our eviction protection work included federal, state, and local advocacy to create and improve the state’s rental assistance program, update court processes, protect renters from negative debt and credit impacts, and secure an unprecedented commitment from the state to cover 100% of rent and utility debt.

“Benny’s eyes are the homes of silent prayer. It is impossible not to see the hunger, poverty, loneliness, fear, hardships, pain, suffering and despair that our homeless neighbors endure. Benny has been homeless 12 years. I have known him for more than four years. This winter Benny will spend a significant amount of time searching for a safe place to rest so that he does not become a victim of a crime. He will sleep at least some of the time under a bridge alongside a highway or road. Sometimes the bridge will leak, and Benny will get wet. Sometimes Benny will be too cold and wet to sleep. The search for food will also consume a lot of Benny’s time.”
ADMINISTRATIVE & BUDGET ADVOCACY

AUTOMATICALLY MOVING COVERED CALIFORNIA FROM BRONZE TO SILVER PLANS

There are many scenarios when Covered California enrollees end up choosing a health plan that doesn’t make financial sense because an equal, cheaper option is available through the same company. Advocacy by Western Center’s health team led Covered California to try a test pilot that automatically moves people enrolled in Bronze plans to the Silver plan offered by the same carrier at renewal, at no additional cost to enrollees.

MEDI-CAL APPLICANTS CAN NOW BE VERIFIED BY PHONE

The California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) changed its policy to allow Medi-Cal beneficiaries and applicants to submit required verifications via telephone. Previously, cumbersome paper verifications were required. During the pandemic, telephonic affidavits were allowed under special disaster rules. Thanks to Western Center’s advocacy, DHCS and counties saw how much the policy helped people access care. Now people can apply for and renew Medi-Cal entirely by phone – a win for everyone.

MARCIE

"Millions of senior Americans rely on social security benefits for the majority of their income, but the average benefit of just over $1,500 a month doesn’t provide enough income to cover basic necessities like rent, food, and medical. Many seniors end up homeless. Older adults are the fastest-growing segment of California’s homeless."

FAIR HOUSING REGULATIONS TO PROTECT HOUSING VOUCHER AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS

After several years of advocacy with the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, the Fair Employment and Housing Council finalized regulations implementing key anti-discrimination provisions in state law. Western Center organized a coalition of groups to submit multiple comment letters and provide public testimony advocating for strong regulatory language to ensure robust fair housing protections. The new regulations went into effect January 1, 2022 and will be a critical tool in combatting discriminatory housing practices. In addition to provisions regarding intentional discrimination and discriminatory advertisements, the regulations implement a new legal requirement created by SB 329, a bill Western Center co-sponsored that prohibits landlords from refusing to rent to people who use housing vouchers.

RENTAL ASSISTANCE ADVOCACY

To track racial disparities in California’s rental assistance program, Western Center led a prolonged advocacy campaign with the Department of Housing and Community Development to get meaningful data on the state’s rental assistance program. The data will allow us to match applications with census data to use in our partnership with Housing Now and PolicyLink to build a dashboard of racial disparities in the program.

REDDING DEBT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE HOSPITALS

Local legal aid programs reported that many individuals leaving state mental hospitals had astronomical debt that they and their families were liable for (over $1 million in one case), so Western Center investigated how people held against their will were charged upon release. Following our administrative advocacy, the department agreed to remove family member liability and put a moratorium on collection as they develop a financial assistance plan that closely aligns with our recommendations.

PLANNED ELIMINATION OF THE MEDI-CAL ASSETS TEST

Older Californians and some people with disabilities can only apply for Medi-Cal if they have very limited savings or other assets. The current limit of $2000 in non-exempt assets for an individual has not changed since the 1980s. Thanks in part to Western Center’s ongoing advocacy, the state agreed to dramatically increase the limit in July of 2022 so more people can qualify for Medi-Cal without having to choose between savings and health care. This is an important race equity win, as the current rules privilege things like homeownership and retirement accounts, which are harder for communities of color to access due to policies that continue to exclude them from neighborhoods, banks, and jobs with full benefits.
For Jonah and many others, homelessness is the whale that swallows you. You sit in the belly of the beast uncertain whether you will get a second chance, whether the whale will spit you out. And if you do escape homelessness, will you ever be the same? The stress of experiencing homelessness may exacerbate previous mental illness and encourage anxiety, fear, depression, sleeplessness, and substance use.

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JUDGMENT ENTERED:
Huntington Beach v. State of California

The City of Huntington Beach contended that laws requiring it to provide its fair share of affordable housing were unconstitutional. Kennedy Commission, California Coalition for Rural Housing, and Housing California intervened in the suit to defend the constitutionality of these laws. Last January, the trial court rejected the city’s challenge, meaning the city is required to comply with the obligation to streamline approval of projects containing affordable housing, ensure that there is no net loss of affordable housing when new development occurs, and comply with related requirements promoting affordable housing. Western Center co-counseled with Legal Aid of Southern California, California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, and Public Interest Law Project on behalf of interveners.

LAWSUITS

SETTLED: Hall v. USDA

In April, Western Center and Impact Fund settled Hall V. USDA, which we filed to challenge USDA guidance from 2020 that denied people receiving the maximum amount of SNAP (formerly known as “food stamps”) food benefits—namely those with very little or no income—the additional emergency allotments authorized by Congress for the pandemic. Under the terms of the settlement, USDA agreed to stop enforcing the rule in California. The day following the settlement, USDA issued new guidance to provide emergency allotments to all SNAP households.

“Hopefully this lawsuit will be a reminder of this: not enough is not enough, no matter how much you receive. I hope this is a springboard for recognizing the shortcomings in SNAP and making more changes to combat hunger.”

– PLAINTIFF, STEVEN SUMMERS

SETTLED: Rivera v. Kent

In May, Western Center, Bay Area Legal Aid, Central California Legal Services, Multiforum Advocacy Solutions, Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County, and the National Health Law Program settled our case, Rivera v. Kent. Hundreds of thousands of Californians with low incomes will now have speedier access to health care thanks to this seven-year lawsuit, which requires California’s Department of Health Care Services to allow eligible Medi-Cal applicants to receive health coverage right away, rather than waiting weeks or even months for verification.

We filed this case on behalf of people like our plaintiff Frances Rivera, who lost her adult son to a treatable condition while he waited for the state to approve his Medi-Cal application. Shortly after he died—more than six months after he first applied—Rivera received her son’s approval for Medi-Cal.
PROTECTIONS UPHELD:
Southern California Rental Housing
Association v. County of San Diego
Western Center, Legal Aid Society of San Diego,
and Susman Godfrey LLP intervened on behalf
of ACCE Action in Southern California Rental
Housing Association v. County of San Diego,
a landlord group’s challenge to the county’s
emergency COVID eviction protection ordinance.
The landlord group filed a motion to stop
enforcement of the ordinance, which was denied
in July, after our intervention. This is the second
time Western Center has represented tenant
advocacy groups to intervene in lawsuits brought
by landlords attempting to stop emergency
COVID tenant protections.

FILED:
Hunger Action Los Angeles
v. County of Los Angeles
Also in November, Western Center filed a lawsuit
alongside Neighborhood Legal Services of Los
Angeles County and Public Interest Law Project
against Los Angeles County for failing to follow
state law for getting emergency food benefits to
people who need it within three days. We filed the
lawsuit on behalf of Hunger Action Los Angeles,
Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN),
and Peter Torres-Gutierrez, a CalFresh recipient
who had to wait over a month for CalFresh when
he and his father had no money for food. Our
lawsuit demands that the county comply with
its obligation to grant expedited access to
critical food benefits.

SETTLED:
Banda v. County of San Bernardino
In December, we settled our case against the
County of San Bernardino, resulting in several
changes to the county’s General Relief program
to help more people in extreme poverty access
vital financial assistance. General Relief is the
program administered by California counties
to provide cash assistance to adults without
any other income or resources to meet their
basic needs. Prior to the suit, evidence indicated
that the low number of General Relief recipients
in San Bernardino was the result of unlawful
restrictions on eligibility and an onerous
application process. The county also paid a
much lower monthly grant than what’s required
—a single individual could only receive a
maximum of $280 per month. Additionally,
the county terminated benefits to homeless
recipients who could not find housing within
the first 30 days of getting benefits. Our case
prompted the county to make substantial
changes to its General Relief process, making it
easier to access and maintain assistance moving
forward. The biggest change is the dollar increase
in assistance — the county already increased the
grant amount to $332 per month for an individual,
and it will be $504 beginning in 2026.

“There is no justification for the way
Latinx families at Harbor Regional
Center are treated. Regional Centers
like Harbor are mandated by the
state to provide the kind of care
these families are asking for. It’s bad
eough they must fight to receive
services — the racial discrimination
takes the urgency of the situation
to another level.”
— WESTERN CENTER ATTORNEY, DAVID KANE

“Each time the county fails to
process an application on time, it
puts people in danger of hunger and
pushes parents into a devastating
struggle to provide for their
children’s most basic needs.”
— WESTERN CENTER ATTORNEY, ALEX PRIETO

FILED:
Padres Buscando el Cambio
v. Harbor Regional Center
In November, Western Center filed a lawsuit
alongside Disability Rights California on behalf
of a parent group in Torrance, California to stop
discrimination against Latinx families seeking
services at Harbor Regional Center. Currently,
Harbor Regional Center spends only 37 cents on
Latinx individuals with developmental disabilities
for every dollar it spends on white individuals.
Additionally, Latinx parents seeking help for their
children from Harbor Regional Center also faced
explicitly discriminatory comments from staff.
Our lawsuit seeks to compel Harbor Regional Center
and the California Department of Developmental
Services to fulfill their obligation to deliver services
that meet the needs of the Latinx community.

“The dollar increase is significant
for people who rely on this program,
as is the increased ease of access.
$500 can make a big difference for
someone experiencing homelessness.
It’s a stepping stone for finding
housing, getting a job, and becoming
an integrated member of the
community.”
— WESTERN CENTER DIRECTOR
OF LITIGATION, RICHARD ROTHSCHILD
“Juan is 71 years old and owns a small landscaping business. He and his grandson mow lawns. I have known Juan for a little more than 3 years. I speak a little Spanish. Juan speaks a little English. We see each other on Saturday mornings at a Natomas coffee shop. Juan and I didn’t see one another during the height of the pandemic. When I started venturing out again, the folks at the coffee shop told me that Juan had a stroke. About five months ago, Juan began cutting grass again. Juan lost many of his landscaping accounts during the pandemic and while he was recovering from his stroke. For Juan and many other seniors, it is a day-to-day struggle to make ends meet.”

A major highlight of Western Center’s legislative efforts in 2021 is SB 65, the California Momnibus bill to address birthing disparities for Black and indigenous Californians. The passage of SB 65 is a product of a multi-year coalition effort and substantial community input. We are incredibly proud to be a part of the movement working hard to end racial discrimination when people give birth in California.

Another major achievement is the passage of SB 62, The Garment Worker Protection Act, which makes California an international leader in the fight to end exploitation of people working in the garment industry by ensuring decent wages for California garment workers.
Western Center was a key partner in the coalition that fought to extend California’s temporary stop on evictions due to the fallout from the ongoing pandemic. Our coalition also worked to develop and implement California’s Emergency Rental Assistance Program. There is much more to do as funding from the federal government has not kept up with the state’s needs. Western Center continues to push California leaders to devote more state funding to rental assistance, and to establish greater protections to prevent evictions – a significant cause of the state’s homelessness crisis.

**FINANCIAL SECURITY**

**SB 62** – The Garment Worker Protection Act seeks to end wage theft in the California garment industry and ensure decent wages for California garment workers by holding California fashion brands to a higher standard of responsibility for the labor of garment workers.

**HOUSING**

**AB 832** – Extended the temporary halt on evictions for nonpayment of rent until September 31, 2021. The bill also created additional tenant protections in court that may halt an eviction if the tenant qualifies and has an approved application for rent relief.

**AB 838** – Enforcement Response to Housing Complaints: Prohibits local code inspection agencies in California from implementing restrictions or preconditions before responding to tenant habitability complaints. The bill specifically prohibits code enforcement agencies from refusing to inspect a unit based on unreasonable conditions, including on the basis that the tenant is behind on rent, is alleged to be in violation of their lease, or is currently in an unlawful detainer (eviction) or other legal dispute with the landlord.

**AB 1304** – Affirmatively Further Fair Housing: Strengthens requirements for cities and counties to analyze and proactively address fair housing issues as part of their obligation to affirmatively further fair housing. The bill requires the housing element to include an analysis of how the jurisdiction’s inventory of housing affirmatively furthers fair housing; requires that in assessing contributing factors to fair housing issues, jurisdictions look through both a local and a regional lens, take race into account, and examine historical context; and requires jurisdictions to state explicit goals, objectives, and policies related to affirmatively furthering fair housing.

**SB 91** – Expanded protections provided by AB 3088 (2020) and established a statewide rental relief program that pays up to 100% of arrears, prospective rent, and utilities for households experiencing COVID financial hardships. The bill also extended a temporary halt on evictions for nonpayment of rent until June 2021. SB 91 prohibited landlords from charging or attempting to charge late fees and explicitly prohibits the sale or assignment of any unpaid COVID rental debt.

**WESTERN CENTER BILLS SIGNED IN 2021:**

**HEALTH**

**SB 65** – The California Momnibus is an innovative and comprehensive piece of legislation that reimagines perinatal care in order to close existing racial gaps in maternal and infant mortality and morbidity within the state.

**AB 326** – Removes the sunset clause to permanently extend the Consumer Protection Program, which awards advocacy fees to any person or organization that represents the interests of consumers and has made a substantial contribution on regulations, orders, or decisions within the Department of Managed Health Care.

**AB 1020** – Enforcement of the Hospital Fair Pricing Act: With this bill we hope that patients no longer need lawyers to benefit from the Hospital Fair Pricing Act. This bill rose directly out of our legal services partners’ experience trying to enforce a law that provides free or discounted hospital care to patients with low incomes. Major components include prohibiting hospitals from selling debt to debt buyers unless they meet all the current debt collector standards and agree to take a bill back if the patient should have gotten financial assistance, Medi-Cal, or another payor for their bill; requiring debt collectors and debt buyers to also send patients applications for financial assistance; and increasing eligibility for patients for financial assistance from 350% of the poverty level to 400%.
COVID-19 ADVOCATE ROUNDTABLES
Our housing team convenes bi-weekly calls with eviction defense advocates across the state to share updates and answer questions about complex COVID eviction protections and to gather information about what is happening on the ground to inform our advocacy with the legislature, the governor’s office, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. We’ve received great feedback from attendees who find it incredibly helpful to talk to colleagues across California to share information about what’s happening in their jurisdictions and to strategize on cases. Calls are attended by 150-300 advocates from around the state.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
Western Center attorneys and advocates provide help to hundreds of legal services and community-based attorneys and advocates throughout the state and nation. We continued meeting virtually in 2021, which means our reach and impact continues to expand. The webinar platform allows us to reach a wider audience and advocates who don’t have the time or resources to travel to in-person trainings. In 2021, we provided over 90 training sessions across our issues areas. Here are some highlights:

“Turner is 68 years old and has been homeless since 2004. He is a 17-year United States Marine Corps veteran. Turner speaks 6 languages and has visited more than 20 countries. On Tuesday, I learned that Turner also plays 5 musical instruments and sings. Here, Turner sings a song he wrote when he was 16 years old. You could tell he was singing from the heart, from a time past. Amazing, simply amazing. No homeless veteran should ever be left behind.”
Western Center’s health team convened a training for attorneys and investigators at the Department of Fair Employment and Housing on discrimination in health care. This was a collaborative effort across multiple legal services programs and an academic partner representing different regions of the state. The training provided the perspectives of seasoned consumer-side attorneys on their application of the state’s anti-discrimination laws in addressing race, gender, and disability discrimination in health care.

Western Center created a groundbreaking seven-part training series on discovery skills from and for the public interest perspective. The Discovery Academy was Western Center’s response to the lack of and imperative need for discovery trainings geared toward legal aid attorneys. An average of 175 people participated in each of the seven live sessions. The Discovery Academy is a complement to our other litigation skills trainings that include writs and appellate advocacy.

Western Center and the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation held six virtual convenings as an opportunity for legal service attorneys to come together to discuss recent legislation, how the law is impacting clients, and other issues of importance to Californians with low incomes. These convenings are instrumental in shaping Western Center’s statewide work for the coming year. The sessions focused on landlord/tenant, land use and anti-displacement issues, fair housing, and mobile home issues.

Service denials based on medical necessity are some of the most factually and procedurally complex cases encountered by health care advocates. To address this, Western Center co-trained advocates of the Health Consumer Alliance on medical necessity standards and advocacy strategies to assist patients who have been denied health care services. We also created a desk guide to go along with the webinar.

In preparation for Medi-Cal Rx implementation, Western Center co-trained over 75 advocates about the shift in how most Medi-Cal members will receive prescription drugs as of January 1, 2022. Rather than the Medi-Cal health plan paying and providing members with needed prescription drugs, a new program called Medi-Cal Rx will provide this service. Training included expected changes, timeline, consumer protections, and other resources.

Together with the California Women’s Law Center, Western Center trained community college counselors and Title IX coordinators about community colleges’ duties to promote and safeguard Title IX protections for pregnant, parenting, and lactating community college students.

“Georgina is a homeless United States Army veteran. I could see that she had been beaten. Georgina’s face was bruised and swollen. She told me that she had been assaulted but didn’t want to talk about it. The majority of unhoused women across the nation — 57% according to recent data — say domestic violence is the direct cause of losing their permanent home. According to a 2020 ‘Women’s Needs Assessment’ released by the LA Downtown Women’s Center, 60% of homeless women said they had been victimized in the past year.”
Western Center’s work is amplified by pro bono partnerships with law firms, law schools, and companies whose attorneys, students, and employees donate thousands of hours to support our work.

“Dennis has been homeless for about a month and lives out of his car. In the United States, homelessness is higher for African Americans than it is for whites. African Americans represent 13 percent of the general population but account for 40 percent of people experiencing homelessness and more than 50 percent of homeless families with children.”

PRO BONO PARTNERS

AKIN GUMP
BAHAR LAW OFFICE
BAUM HEDLUND
BONNETT FAIRBOURN
FRIEDMAN & BALINT PC
COMPLETE DISCOVERY
SOURCE, INC.
CONSUMER LAW CENTER, INC.
COVINGTON
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GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER
HADSELL STORMER RENICK & DAI
HOQ LAW
HUESTON HENNIGAN
KIRKLAND & ELLIS
MANATT, PHELPS & PHILLIPS
McCUNE WRIGHT AREVALO

McDERMOTT, WILL & EMORY
MORRISON & FOERSTER
MULTIFORUM ADVOCACY
SOLUTIONS
MUNGER, TOLLES & OLSON LLP
OLSON & REMCHO
O’MELVENY & MYERS
LAW OFFICE OF RICHARD PEARL
PILLSBURY
RELATIVITY
SECK LAW
SHEPPARD MULLIN
SIDLEY AUSTIN
LAW OFFICE OF CAROL A. SOBEL
SUSMAN GODFREY
TEUKOLSKY LAW
USC GOULD SCHOOL
OF LAW CLINIC
I saw Candi camped next to the freeway. It was a dark hazy day in Northern California, especially if you’re homeless and living next to a freeway. I gave Candi a KN95 mask, which provides minimal protection against ultra-fine wildfire particulates, a flashlight, and mosquito repellant. I think Candi was surprised to see someone drop by her tent and ask how she was doing. I promised that I would visit again.
Larry is 66 years old and has been homeless for five months. At night Larry sleeps in his car, but the car doesn’t run, and he has been given that notice it will be towed away. Larry will soon be sleeping on the streets. When I saw Larry, he was ‘scraping.’ Scrapers collect various discarded and unwanted metals (copper, aluminum, steel, etc.) and sell the metals to a recycler or scrapyard. Larry had just a few cans to show for his morning efforts. California Governor Gavin Newsom stated at the beginning of his term: ‘Let’s call it what it is, a disgrace. It’s a disgrace that the richest state in the richest nation, succeeding across so many sectors, is falling so far behind to properly house, heal and humanely treat so many of its own people.’ For me it is more than a disgrace. Images like Larry’s haunt me. It’s an injustice that Larry scrap to survive and sleeps on a concrete bed.”
“On Monday at 6:30 a.m. Carl’s camp caught fire and burned to the ground. Fortunately, Carl and his dogs escaped harm, but Carl’s meager possessions including food and clothing became ash and cinder. In a little more than 24 hours, Encounter Church, Mercy Pedalers, and Show Up Sac, in a coordinated effort, provided Carl with a new tent, sleeping bag, box of food, shirts, pants, underwear, socks, shoes, toiletries, etc. I saw Carl on Tuesday morning. He’s doing ok, but you can see in his face the devastating impact of his illness and the fire.

“Eddie has been homeless for four years and I could see that the heat was taking a toll. The wildfires coupled with the coronavirus and heat waves have a heavy impact on our homeless neighbors. Extreme heat and poor air quality can lead to serious health consequences including heat stroke, breathing issues, dehydration, and death. Thousands of homeless men, women and children have no permanent place to sleep. For our homeless neighbors there is no escaping the dawg days of summer.”
REVENUE
Grants & Contracts 3,647,398
Contributions 1,000,328
Attorneys’ Fees 770,427
Cy Pres 45,000
Interest & Investments 18,468
Other 848,750
Total Revenue 6,330,371

EXPENSES
Program 3,885,152
General & Administrative 498,096
Fundraising 597,716
Carry Over 1,349,406
Total Expenses 6,330,371

“Andrew has been homeless for five years and lives in a tent city next to a busy freeway. He became homeless as a result of a skateboarding accident in which he incurred a traumatic brain injury. Prior to the injury he had been a state worker. I asked Andrew what it was like living in a tent this past summer with record-setting heat waves and wildfire smoke. Andrew said that on one day the temperature in his tent exceeded 140°F.”
“Monica is 47 years old and has been homeless for 3 years. Alvin is 61 years old and has been homeless for more than 20 years. I have found that homeless hands are gritty texts about survival, hardships, hope, pain, and suffering. Climate change, wildfires and homelessness are killers. One painful lesson we should all have learned by now: ignoring Covid-19, social justice, the homeless and climate change doesn’t make our social and environmental problems go away.”
GALE FILTER  STREET PHOTOGRAPHER AND PHOTOJOURNALIST

Gale is a retired environmental prosecutor, passionate street photographer, and photojournalist. He is a University of San Diego School of Law graduate. For Gale, photography is a powerful means to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, and a catalyst for altering public perception by documenting social and environmental conditions. Instagram: @galefilterphotography