

The **Constitutional Rights Legal Clinic** (CRLC) at Picture the Homeless is the only legal clinic in New York City focused on fighting the criminalization of homelessness. We document police abuse and aim to educate fellow homeless people about their civil and constitutional rights and give them the tools to advocate for themselves in the courts. We also encourage them to join us in working for systemic change in the criminalization laws and enforcement policies that violate peoples' constitutional rights and perpetuate homelessness.

The Legal Clinic currently has hours on **Thursdays at Holy Apostles** (28th St & 9th Ave) from 10am – 1pm. You may also call our main number and make an appointment to speak to us about your police harassment and quality of life law violations, to check your tickets for errors and help you clear up warrants, and to address other similar issues. **Note:** we are not attorneys and we are not qualified to give you in-depth legal advice. We also cannot give you referrals or speak to you about legal issues that are outside the issues that the clinic addresses, like benefits or immigration issues that are not related to police harassment or civil rights.

KNOWING YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:

- 1) Knowing the law is an important tool in fighting police abuse. If you know the law, you can know what to look for in police interactions when you think that the police were violating your rights.
- 2) Just because you are ticketed or arrested for something does not mean that you were doing something illegal. The police can make mistakes in filling out paperwork or be wrong about the law, and you have the right to defend yourself against these errors.
- 3) Common mistakes that the police make are writing the wrong charge or number of the law associated with that charge on your ticket or paperwork. Sometimes the police will write something down that does not match your behavior or will charge you with something (like panhandling) that is not illegal. You can use your knowledge of the law to challenge these types of mistakes in court and as a way to hold the police accountable.

Once you know the law, you can make informed decisions about what your options are and what actions you want to take. You are not a victim of the law, but can be an active participant – from challenging tickets and arrests on an individual level to educating others on their rights and working for social change.

WHAT IS A QUALITY OF LIFE VIOLATION?

“Quality of life” violations are minor offenses like open container and disorderly conduct. They are not crimes, meaning that they should be sealed on your New York State rap sheet and people like potential employers and private landlords should not be able to see them (although NYCHA might).

Quality of life violations are especially problematic because:

- 1) **They target people who are homeless** and are selectively enforced, meaning that police ticket and arrest people who appear homeless and less often ticket and arrest non-homeless people for these same actions.
- 2) **The punishments associated with them are often excessive.** The city of New York accumulated over \$5 million in fines from summonses in 2005. The two most frequently charged summons offenses in 2005 were Open Container and Disorderly Conduct. Also in the top ten were Public Urination (under 2 different codes) and two separate Parks violations. In addition to fines, people are often given community service, a form of slave labor where homeless New Yorkers are forced to work for the city for free for very minor violations of the law.