



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Helping Veterans With Mental Illness Overcome Civil Legal Issues: Collaboration Between a Veterans Affairs Psychosocial Rehabilitation Center and a Nonprofit Legal Center”

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Quick Takeaways:

- Civil legal issues, including warrants, wage garnishment, suspended licenses, and incarceration, can lead to impediments to services and recovery.
- Addressing civil legal issues, such as child support, VA benefit disputes, and eviction notices, can improve recovery and often protect against homelessness.

Study:

This case study describes a partnership between Errera Community Care Center (ECCC) of the VA Connecticut Healthcare System and the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC), a nonprofit independent legal center housed on-site at ECCC. Operating under the theory of therapeutic jurisprudence, the goal of the CVLC is to provide legal service to veterans dealing with homelessness or mental illness and to help them overcome barriers to housing, health care, and other services. CVLC uses full-time staff and volunteers as well as collaborations with the state Bar Association, local law firms, and individual lawyers, to provide counseling, representation, and referrals.

In the first 30 months of service, the CVLC provided aid to 435 veterans dealing with 564 legal issues. Of those issues, 18% were family cases, 17% were public entitlement cases, 14% were housing cases, 11% were bankruptcy and consumer debt cases, 9% were discharge upgrades, and the remainder was cases related to employment, estate planning, and taxes.

The partnership and shared space between ECCC and CVLC means that the two organizations can collaborate, with CVLC pursuing legal remedies as ECCC works towards administrative remedies. CVLC's interactions with veterans are protected by attorney/client privilege, and ECCC's are protected by HIPPA laws. In order for a full collaboration, written consent must be obtained from the veteran.

Conclusion:

Unaddressed civil legal issues can often lead to other problems, such as a revoked driver's license, garnishing of wages, or arrest and incarceration. Unresolved disputes between landlord and tenant can lead to an eviction. These can all be barriers to services and recovery.

Legal aid is one of the services most requested by homeless veterans. Partnerships, such as the one between CVLC and ECCC, present a useful model of how legal services can be made a part of the general supported service model.