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FREE LEGAL SERVICES FOR VETERANS GETS MAJOR BOOST FROM FOUR GRANT PARTNERSHIPS

WEST HAVEN, CT (July 27, 2020) –

To support free legal services for veterans, the **Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC)** is proud to announce grant partnerships with the **American Bar Endowment (ABE)**, the **Bob Woodruff Foundation (BWF)**, the **Fairfield County Community Foundation (FCCF)**, and the **Comcast NBCUniversal Foundation**.

CVLC provides free legal services for veterans recovering from homelessness and mental illnesses to break down legal barriers to healthcare, housing, and income. To rise to the challenge of the pandemic, CVLC is ramping up our programs to meet the growing demand for life-changing legal services. These grants support two programs at CVLC, Removing Legal Barriers and Veterans Inclusion Project.

CVLC has received grants from The Bob Woodruff Foundation and the Fairfield County Community Foundation in support of CVLC's Removing Legal Barriers program, a medical-legal partnership pairing legal representation with emergency support services, social services, and mental health care to successfully move veterans from homelessness to financial and housing security.

As part of their partnership with the National Football League, the Bob Woodruff Foundation is providing funding to address the additional mental health, financial, and housing hardships veterans are experiencing during the pandemic. "We're proudly supporting programs that are doing important work to address the deep and urgent challenges facing our veterans," said Dr. Margaret Harrell, Chief Program Officer of the Bob Woodruff Foundation.

Fairfield County Community Foundation awarded a program grant to serve Fairfield County veterans to increase housing security among low income veterans. Homeless people, especially homeless veterans, have greater vulnerability to coronavirus. The veteran death rate for coronavirus is 8 percent, higher than the national fatality rate of 5.8 percent. Black and Hispanic veterans are testing positive at higher rates and may be at greater risk for coronavirus.

"In the past few months, we have seen the strength of our medical-legal partnership rise to the challenges created by the coronavirus pandemic," said Liam Brennan, CVLC Executive Director. "There has never been a greater need for removing legal barriers so that veterans have access to health care, are able to secure adequate income, and don't become homeless. With the support of

our funding partners, we are able to continue to provide these vital services at no cost to our veteran clients.”

CVLC received an Opportunity Grant from the American Bar Endowment to create training videos so that CVLC can expand our pro bono network in Connecticut and across the country. CVLC also received a Project Innovation Grant from the Comcast NBCUniversal Foundation to help create more inclusive eligibility policies for veterans seeking mental healthcare by empowering veterans who have been denied benefits to tell their stories about the harmful impacts of exclusionary policy. These grants support CVLC’s Veteran Inclusion Project, an advocacy program to reduce the number of veterans who are unjustly barred from mental healthcare, disability benefits, and supportive services. The Veteran Inclusion Project uses storytelling, public health research, and legal advocacy to effect change in the systemic barriers many veterans face in receiving the benefits they earned through their service.

This advocacy and training program goes hand-in-hand with CVLC’s medical legal practice. All too often, service-connected mental health problems result in unjust “bad paper” discharges for veterans. Instead of receiving the care they need, they are turned away from the VA. Unfortunately, veterans outside of VA care have a 30% higher rate of suicide compared to those with access to VA care. “The need is too immense, and the consequences too dire for direct services alone,” says Margaret Kuzma, CVLC Veteran Inclusion Project Director. “Veterans deserve empowering information to self-advocate; pro bono attorneys require training to increase the capacity for representation; systemic barriers must be broken through innovative policy proposals; and, most fundamentally, these veterans’ stories need to be heard.”

Just last month, more than 60 veterans called CVLC about the legal issues they are facing and the calls keep coming. At the end of the summer, we expect housing issues and evictions to spike due financial hardship from the economic downturn and the impending end of the moratorium on evictions. In an effort to prevent a rise in veteran homelessness, we are preparing ourselves and our pro bono partners to handle this uptick in housing cases.

For every dollar put into our programs, CVLC now generates approximately \$20 in tangible benefits for our veteran clients. In the last decade, CVLC has helped over 3,000 veterans, secured more than \$80 million in veteran benefits and other income, and more than \$50 million in healthcare benefits for veterans. These grant partnerships totaling \$240,000 will provide the resources necessary to continue our life-changing legal work to protect our most vulnerable veterans during this global crisis.

About Connecticut Veterans Legal Center: Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC) helps veterans recovering from homelessness and mental illness overcome legal barriers to housing, healthcare, and income. Formed in 2009, CVLC was the first medical-legal partnership (“MLP”) to integrate legal services on-site at VA mental health facilities. In addition to in-house legal staff, hundreds of volunteer attorneys across Connecticut work with CVLC to help veterans resolve legal issues that destabilize their housing, employability, disability income, transportation, and family relationships.

www.CTVeteransLegal.org

About the Bob Woodruff Foundation: The Bob Woodruff Foundation (BWF) was founded in 2006 after reporter Bob Woodruff was hit by a roadside bomb while covering the war in Iraq. Since then, the Bob Woodruff Foundation has led an enduring call to action for people to stand up for heroes and meet the emerging and long-term needs of today's veterans. To date, BWF has invested more than \$70 million to Find, Fund and Shape™ programs that have empowered impacted veterans, service members and their families. For more information, please visit bobwoodrufffoundation.org or follow us on Twitter at @Stand4Heroes.

About Fairfield County Community Foundation: Fairfield County's Community Foundation promotes philanthropy as a means to create change in Fairfield County, focusing on innovative and collaborative solutions to critical issues impacting the community. Individuals, families, corporations and organizations can establish charitable funds or contribute to existing funds. The Community Foundation is in compliance with the Council on Foundations' national standards, and has awarded \$180 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County and beyond. For more information, visit www.fccfoundation.org.

About the American Bar Endowment: The [American Bar Endowment](http://www.americanbar.org) (ABE) sponsors quality, affordable group insurance products, exclusively for ABA lawyer members. The unique charitable giving feature of each ABE-sponsored insurance plan gives insureds the opportunity to donate any available dividends. The ABE mission is to make a difference by funding programs that improve access to justice and advance the American justice system and the rule of law. The ABE established an Opportunity Grants Program, to support new, innovative programs and projects by eligible grantees that fit within that mission. You can learn more about ABE Opportunity Grants by visiting www.americanbar.org/opportunit-grants/. Stephen Zack, ABE's President, said, "With the financial support of our insureds who generously donate their dividends from ABE-sponsored insurance, we are able to fund a diverse array of organizations and projects, including programs that ensure due process to veterans, such as Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC)."

About Comcast NBCUniversal Foundation: NBC Universal's Project Innovation grants fund nonprofits to create a culture of inclusion, ensuring equitable access, opportunities, and resources for traditionally underrepresented communities through youth education, next generation storytellers and community engagement.