

**CONNECTICUT  
VETERANS  
LEGAL  
CENTER**



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**Impact Report  
Fiscal Year  
2021-2022**







## Weir's Words

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As Connecticut Veterans Legal Center's (CVLC) newly appointed Executive Director, and former member of the Board of Directors, I am usually asked what drew me to CVLC.

My answer is always the same:

**I came because of the mission and stayed because of the people.**

Since 2009, our important mission has remained the same – we remove legal barriers to housing, health care and income on behalf of veterans with low-income facing homelessness and diagnosed with mental illness. We are the only civil legal aid program targeting the legal needs of Connecticut's veterans in the nation's first medical legal partnership with the VA.

Our people remain incredibly talented – and have become even more diverse. This past fiscal year we welcomed 6 new staff members, including two attorneys in our Civil Legal Unit, a paralegal, an Intake and Access Specialist, Project Coordinator, and Chief of Staff. More recently, we've hired a VA Benefits Attorney, Screening Attorney, and Screening Assistant.

We tackled the urgent barriers veterans are facing: stable housing and racial disparities in the administrative separation process.

CVLC deepened its connection with the "Big Four" civil legal aid programs by joining Connecticut's Right to Counsel in Tenant Evictions movement to ensure even more veterans at-risk of homelessness are able to access our legal representation. Connecticut is the third state in the entire country to pass a right to counsel law for tenants.

And, we finalized 3 years of FOIA military separation data collection and analysis. The results determine Black service members are more likely – even twice as likely – than White service members to receive less than honorable discharges. Our "Discretionary Injustice: How Racial Disparities in the Military's Administration Separation System Harm Black Veterans" Report was nationally released later in 2022.

As an Air Force Veteran I am very proud of the measurable impact our program and its people make in the lives of those who have served our country.

CVLC's mission and its people also includes you. As an independent non-profit, we could not do this work without the grants, donations, and volunteer time so many give each year. Thank you! It is a privilege and honor to do this important work with you and I look forward to our years ahead.



Alison Weir  
Executive Director

# Medical Legal Partnership

CVLC is the nation's first civil legal aid program to form a medical-legal partnership with the federal VA. CVLC co-locates and collaborates with the VA Connecticut Healthcare and the State of Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs to provide free civil legal services to low income veterans where they receive their health care.

Our deep collaboration with VA Connecticut Healthcare and the CT DVA is mission critical to improving the social determinants of health for Connecticut's most vulnerable veterans. The richness of our relationships with both clients and their clinicians enables a seamless integration of legal care that stabilizes veterans by ensuring adequate income, housing, and access to health care.

## Legal Representation is Good Medicine



**Veteran faces a legal issue** that threatens to destabilize her housing, income, or access to health care.



**VA clinicians connect the veteran to CVLC attorneys.** Other community partners send CVLC a referral and we connect to the veteran where they receive services.



**Lawyers work with the veteran and their mental health and medical team** to solve immediate problems such as pending evictions and address root causes such as a lack of disability benefits.



**Without legal barriers,** the veteran can focus on taking care of health, family, and career.

# Removing Legal Barriers



CVLC is the only legal aid organization in Connecticut to provide direct representation in VA benefits claims and applications for discharge upgrades from the Department of Defense. CVLC's representation also includes traditional legal aid related to family law, housing, criminal record expungement, bankruptcy, debt, Social Security, employment, and estate planning issues.

## In 2022 CVLC Served 1,014 Veterans and Addressed 752 Legal Issues

### 2022 Impact Stories



VA Benefits appeal moved a disabled veteran from poverty to sustainable income.



Negotiating debt re-payment and accessing VA healthcare enabled a veteran to move to independent living.



Legal representation in housing court ensured that an unexpected car bill did not lead to eviction



Return of security deposit plus housing support from the VA ensured housing continuity for a veteran and his children.



Overturning a bad paper discharge gave access to life-saving medical care for service-related illnesses.



# Housing, Healthcare & Income



## 1:20 Return on Investment

For every \$1 invested in CVLC, approximately \$20 of tangible benefits are created for veterans.

### **\$2.4 Million**

#### **Financial Awards**

Disabled veterans are more likely to live in poverty. Renegotiating debt, filing for retroactive payment of benefits, and ensuring return of security deposits are ways CVLC helps veterans secure a brighter future.

### **\$15 Million**

#### **Lifetime Income**

CVLC is the only legal aid program in the state that helps veterans assert their rights before the Dept. of Defense and the Dept. of Veterans Affairs. Without legal help few veterans prevail; nearly 50% of cases are rejected on purely procedural reasons.

### **\$11.8 Million**

#### **Health Benefits**

Access to VA health care is critical. VA eligibility is a complex process with a growing number of veterans turned away unjustly. CVLC attorneys represent veterans before the VA and through DoD appeals.



# Power of Pro Bono Partnership

“ We don't do enough for our service members. They are just grateful and happy for anything you can do. Their attitude has an effect on me. You should have lawyers beating down the door to help your clients. ”  
-Michael Kennedy, Pro Bono Attorney



**194 pro bono cases**

**\$727,500 in pro bono services**

## 2022 Awards & Recognition

Connecticut Law Tribune  
Unsung Hero Award  
**Christopher Brogan**  
*CVLC Pro Bono Volunteer*

Hartford County Bar Assc.  
The Liberty Bell Award  
**Cynthia Johnson**  
*CVLC Deputy Director*

Connecticut Bar Charles J. Parker  
Legal Services Award  
**Mary-Christy Fisher**  
*CVLC Senior Counsel*

CT Bar Association Honorable  
Anthony V. DeMayo  
Pro Bono Award  
**Sarah E. Dlugoszewski**  
*Shipman & Goodwin, LLP*

Connecticut 40 under 40  
Class of 2022 Award  
**Ashleigh Backman**  
*CVLC Director of Pro Bono  
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**Thank You!** We are grateful for the hundreds of donors, volunteers, and partners who are passionate about justice for veterans. Thank you for sharing our vision of ensuring that all veterans live with adequate means, safe and secure housing, and affordable healthcare.\*

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Special Thank You to

### Celine Finn, Captain USN (Retired)

for her bequest gift.

*If you would like more information about adding CVLC to your will  
or would like to set up a planned gift please contact  
Shannon Mykins at [smykins@ctveteranslegal.org](mailto:smykins@ctveteranslegal.org)*

*\*All donors who gave \$500 or more between July 1, 2021 and December 30, 2022. If we missed your name, please contact Patrick J Dunn at [pdunn@ctveteranslegal.org](mailto:pdunn@ctveteranslegal.org)*

## Visit CVLC

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### CVLC Mission

The mission of Connecticut Veterans Legal Center is to help veterans recovering from homelessness and mental illness overcome legal barriers to housing, healthcare and income.



[ctveteranslegal.org](http://ctveteranslegal.org)



@ctveteranslegal